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ROSE D'ALBRET;

OR

TROUBLOUS TIMES.

VOL. I.





ROSE D'ALBRET;

OR

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TROUBLOUS TIMES.

A ROMANCE.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF

"DARNLEY," "DE L'ORME," "THE FALSE HEIR,"
"ARABELLA STUART," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

No lengthened preface is necessary to the following pages. The scene in which the events of the tale take place, and the time of action, are both extremely circumscribed; the former only extending over about forty square miles, the latter not comprising more than eight days. The work is therefore more like a drama than a romance; but I am inclined to believe that this will be found no disadvantage, where the circumstances naturally lead to the adoption of such a plan.

I doubt not that many of my readers, and amongst them some of the most amiable, will inquire, "Were there people ever so wicked

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as they are here represented?" Nor will they be the most ignorant who put this question; for, in this country especially, a great defect exists in historical writing. We have histories of wars and battles and political institutions; but we have few if any histories of society. We have histories of inventions, we have histories of arts; but we have no accurate tracing of the influence of institutions, discoveries, revolutions, and struggles upon the general mind and character of nations. Such a history, though it would be one of the most interesting, as well as the most instructive, still remains to be written in our language.

If the reader, however, will take the trouble of looking into the memoirs of the times spoken of in these pages, he will find that the men and women of that epoch were worse—far worse than any of the persons here depicted—that corruption was more general, vice more daring, selfishness even less restrained. The only incidents in the story which may

be called romantic, are facts upon record. That with which the work opens is well known; and, in regard to the means employed to force an innocent girl into a marriage with a man whom she detested, I need only say, that the same were adopted in a noble family of the south of France, towards the year 1587, with circumstances of violence and licentiousness which I have not thought fit to introduce into this tale, and unhappily with success.

The work has been written a long time; and in reading it over, after having had occasion to study the subject deeply for other objects, I feel that I can safely put it forth as a tolerably correct picture of the state of society, in the country and the period to which it refers.



ROSE D'ALBRET;

OR

TRUBLOUS TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

WHATSOEVER effect the institution of Chivalry might have upon the manners and customs of the people of Europe; however much it might mitigate the rudeness of the middle ages, and soften the character of nations just emerging from barbarism, there was one point which it left untouched by its softening influence, and which remained, till within a few years of the present period, as a case of great hardship upon those who are supposed to have benefited more particularly by the rise of chivalrous feeling. Women, to whose defence the knights of old devoted their swords : women, for whose honour and renown so many a gallant champion has shed his blood : women, for whose love so many

SECRET

wars have been kindled and so many deeds done, were, till within a short period of the present day, mere slaves in those matters where their own happiness was concerned. Their influence, it is true, might be great over the heart and mind, but in person, at least till after their marriage, they were simply bondswomen ; they ruled without power even over themselves, and had no authority whatsoever in those transactions which were of the most importance to them.

Where parents were living—although even then it was thought scarcely necessary to consult a young woman upon the disposal of her own hand,—yet we may suppose that parental affection might occasionally enable her to exercise some influence, however small, in the acceptance or rejection of a lover. But where the parents were dead, she had for many centuries, especially in France, no voice whatever in the matter, and was consigned, often against her inclination, to the arms of one whom perhaps she had never seen, whom she often regarded with indifference, and often with hate.

It is little to be wondered at that such a state of things produced gross immorality. The first act of a young woman's life, the act alone by which she obtained comparative freedom, being one by which all the fine and delicate sensibilities, planted by God in the female heart, were violated at once,—it is little to be wondered at, I say, that the vows by which men endeavoured to supply the place of principles, should be violated likewise at the voice of inclination.

The fault, however, was in the feudal system ; and the manner in which lands were first acquired in Europe, produced regulations for their transmission which generated the greatest social evils,—from the consequences of which indeed we are not yet altogether free. Each feof was required to be held by a man who could do service to his sovereign in the field ; and, consequently, when any vassal or vavasour died, leaving behind him one or more daughters, the law required that the feof should be managed by a guardian till such time as, by marriage, the heiress or heiresses could present men to do homage for their lands, and perform military

service to the superior lord. Thus, an heiress could not marry without her lord's approbation; and by the constitutions of St. Louis it was enacted, that, even where a daughter was left under the care of her mother, the lord might require security that she should not form an alliance without his consent; and the good king, in the rule which he lays down for the choice of a husband for a ward, directs the guardian simply, if there be two or three who offer, to take the richest.

As the feudal system declined in France, however, the power of the lord over his vassals of course diminished, and long before the end of the sixteenth century it was but little exercised by one nobleman over another. In cases where large inheritance fell to daughters, their marriages were made up in their own families; and though they themselves had, in general, as little choice allowed them as ever, yet their own relations were the persons who selected the future companions of their life. Thus fathers, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, had all far more

When a father died, however, leaving his daughter to the care of a guardian, he transmitted to him the great power he himself possessed ; and if the young lady were the heiress of great wealth, it generally happened that the person selected for her husband was a son or near relation of her guardian. Very often, indeed, her hand was made a matter of merchandise and sold to the best bidder, so that the guardianship of an heiress was not unfrequently a profitable speculation.

During the last half of the sixteenth century, indeed, almost all these rules and regulations were broken through, in the midst of the civil contentions which then existed in France ; and we find several instances, even in the highest ranks of society, of children marrying against the will of their parents, when an opportunity was afforded them of escaping parental rule. Such was the case with the daughter of the Duke of Montpensier ; but in this, as in many other

instances, religious differences had their share, and the principle of liberty, which rose with the Protestant religion, affected even the relations of domestic life. To guard against the opportunities thus afforded, by the troubles of the times, for ladies to choose as they thought fit, many very violent and tyrannical acts were committed ; and, on the other hand, where power could venture to outstep the law, shameful breaches of right and justice took place to get possession of the person of an heiress, who was looked upon and treated by all parties merely as the chief title-deed of the estate. Thus the celebrated Duke of Mayenne himself carried off by force out of Guyenne, from the care of her own mother, Mademoiselle de Caumont in order to marry her to one of his own sons, though she had been already contracted to another person from the very cradle.

Such a strange state of things was farther complicated by the rights of the monarch to certain privileges of guardianship, known by the name of *gardes nobles*, by which he was entitled, by himself or his officers, to take into his charge

the estates and persons of certain orphans under age ; and, according to the corrupt practices of the times, the tutelage of the royal wards, in particular provinces, was often made a matter of merchandise, and still more frequently was bestowed upon unworthy persons, and obtained by the most corrupt means.

To all these complicated and evil arrangements must be added another custom of those times, which perhaps was devised for the purpose of obviating some of the bad consequences of the existing state of things. I allude to the habit of affiancing at a very early period. Sometimes this engagement between the children of two noble houses was confirmed by every ceremony which could render the act inviolable in the eyes of the church and the eyes of the law : sometimes, however, a less solemn compact was entered into by the parents, subject to certain conditions, and these were frequently rescinded, changed, or modified, according to circumstances. In many instances the heiress of a noble house was left by a dying parent to the guardianship of a friend, under con-

tract to marry that friend's heir on arriving at a fixed period of life ; and in such circumstances, whatever might be her inclination to break this engagement, when her reason or her heart led her towards another union, she would have found it very difficult to escape from the trammels imposed upon her, even to take shelter within the walls of a convent.

It has seemed necessary to give these explanations in this introductory chapter, that the reader may clearly understand the circumstances of the parties in the following tale ; and I shall only farther add, that at the time when the history is supposed to commence, a long period of strife and confusion had thrown the country into a state of anarchy, in which law was daily set at defiance, even for the pettiest objects ; every evil passion found indulgence under the shield of faction ; the most violent, the most unjust, and the most criminal proceedings took place in every part of the realm ; might made right throughout the country ; and the bigoted priesthood were generally found ready to assist in any dark plot or cunning

scheme, where the interests of their patrons might be served, or the objects of their own order advanced.

At the same time, though tranquillity was in no degree recovered, everything was tending to its restoration. Henry III. who had sanctioned, instigated, or committed every sort of crime, had fallen under the knife of the assassin. Henri Quatre was daily strengthening his tottering throne by victory, clemency, and policy. The battle of Arques had been fought and won, and the king, with a small but veteran and gallant army, had advanced towards the capital and was besieging the town of Dreux,

CHAPTER II.

ON the confines of Normandy, towards that part of Maine which joins the Orleanois, and nearly on a straight line between Mortagne and Orleans, lies a track of wild common land, unfit for cultivation. It is now covered with low bushes, stunted trees, gorse, fern, and brush-wood, though often presenting patches of short grass, which serve as pasture-ground for the sheep and cattle of the neighbouring villages, which are few and far between.

The extent of this somewhat dreary district is about five miles in one direction and six in another, and it is broken by hill and dale, deep pits and quarries, rushy pools and swamps, over which at night hovers the will-o'-the-wisp, while every now and then a tall beech or wide spreading oak attests the existence in former days of an extensive forest, now only tradi-

tionary. On one of the hills towards Chartres appear the ruins of an old castle, which, though not referrible to any very remote period, must have been a place of some strength; and below is a little hamlet, with a small church, containing several curious monuments, where knights are seen stretched in well sculptured armour, and leaguers, in starched ruffs and slashed pourpoints, lie recumbent in grey stone.

Here, however, in times not very long gone, stretched one of those forests for which France was once famous, though the woods had been cut down some years before the Revolution, and, converted into gold, had furnished many a luxurious banquet, or been spent in revelry and ostentation. It never, indeed, was very extensive, when compared with many of the forests that surrounded it, but still, towards the end of the sixteenth century, it possessed scenes of wild beauty rarely to be met with, and some of the finest trees in the country. Through a portion of the wood ran one of the many windings of the river Huisne; and the ground being hilly, as I have said, from the principal eminences the

winding course of that stream might be discovered for several smiles, while here and there many a château, or *maison forte*, appeared in sight, filled with branches of the families of Sourdis, Estrées, Chazeul, de Harault, Liancourt, and others.

One or two village spires also graced the scene, but the eye could catch no town of any great magnitude, which was probably one of the reasons why that district had suffered less severely during the wars of the League than almost any other in France. Several causes, however, had combined to obtain for it this happy immunity. No Protestants were to be found in the immediate neighbourhood, and though all the gentlemen possessing property on the banks of the river were steady Catholics, yet they were in general attached to the cause of order and loyalty, and, while withheld by a feeling of bigotry from supporting in arms a monarch whom they considered a heretic, were unwilling to give the slightest aid to a faction, which they well knew had anything at heart but the maintenance of a religion which they used as a pretext for rebellion.

Thus the tide of war had rolled up the valleys of the Seine and of the Loire; Orleans had been a scene of strife and bloodshed; Alençon had been taken and retaken more than once; Dreux and Chartres had seen armies frequently under their walls; but the tract I speak of, with the country round for several miles, had escaped the scourge of civil contention, and a truce, or convention, existed amongst the noblemen of that part of the country, by virtue of which each enjoyed his own in peace with his neighbours, and feared little the approach of hostile armies, as the ground was unfavourable to military evolutions; and nothing was to be obtained by marching through a country where no wealthy cities afforded an object either to cupidity or ambition.

When any great event was imminent, indeed, and the fortunes of France seemed to hang upon the result of an approaching battle, small bands of armed men hurrying up to join this force or that, would cross the district, carefully watched by the retainers of the different lords in the vicinity of the forest in order to prevent

any outrage, and often the little village church would be thronged with soldiery, who in a few days after left their bones upon some bloody field ; or at other times the wild hymns of the Huguenots would rise up at nightfall from the woodlands, in a strain of strange and scarcely earthly harmony. Then too, in the open field, the Calvinistic preacher would harangue his stern and determined brethren in language full of fiery enthusiasm, and often the Roman Catholic peasant would pause to listen, and go away almost convinced that the traditions to which he had so long clung were false and superstitious.

Few acts of violence, however, were heard of ; and when any of the many bands of plunderers, who taking advantage of the anarchy of the times, scoured the country, pillaging and oppressing both parties alike, appeared in the woods and fields, the gentry, making common cause against them, soon drove them out to carry on their lawless trade elsewhere. Some severe acts of retribution too had been practised on those who were taken, and sometimes for weeks the old oaks were decorated with the acorns of

Tristan the Hermit, as a warning to others of the same class to avoid the dangerous vicinity.

It was not wonderful, therefore, that, on a cold clear day, of the frosty spring of the year 159—, a stout, homely man, about forty years of age, dressed in a plain brown peasant's coat, with a black cloak and large riding boots, should ride along upon a strong bay horse, apparently quite at his ease, though night was not far distant. His dress and his whole appearance bespoke him a farmer well to do in the world ; but farmers in those days were not above any of the acts required by their calling ; and over the crupper of the horse was thrown a large sack of corn, either for sale or for provender.

I have said that the good peasant appeared quite at his ease, and so indeed he was, utterly unconscious of danger ; but that did not imply that he went unprepared for defence, for those were times when such precautions had become habitual with all men. The very labourer went to the field with pike, or large knife, or arquebuse, if he could get it, and the good man we speak of had a long, broad, straight sword;

with iron hilt and clasps, by his side, and two pistols at his saddle-bow. He was a strong, and seemingly an active man, too, though of no very bulky proportions, and somewhat short in stature; and there was an air of determination and vigour about him which would have made a single opponent think twice before he attacked him. Moreover, his countenance displayed a good deal of cool self-possessed *nonchalance*, if I may be permitted for once to use a foreign word, which showed that he was not one to sell either his corn or his life very cheap, and he rode his horse like one well accustomed to its back, and who found no difficulty in managing it at his will.

The evening, though, as I have said, very cold, was beautifully clear; the western sky was all gold and sunshine, the blades of grass, and the leaves that still hung upon the branches—which, like the ungrateful world, had cast off so many of their green companions in the dull moment of adversity—were all white with frost, and the road, though somewhat sandy in its materials, was as hard as adamant.

With a quick habitual motion of the eyes, the farmer glanced from right to left, marking everything around him as he advanced, and once, where the scene was more open and unencumbered with trees, halted for an instant and looked round. He still showed the careless confidence of his heart by humming from time to time snatches of a common song of the day, and once or twice laughed lightly at some thoughts which were passing in his own mind. His features were good, though somewhat too strongly marked, his eyes bright, and clear, his complexion ruddy with health and exposure, and his limbs well knit and strong from labour and hard exercise.

At length the worthy man, trotting on at no very quick pace, began to descend the side of one of the hills of the forest and entered a sort of wild dell, where small broken spots of turf were interspersed with clumps of younger trees, principally ashes and elms, while the older tenants of the wood hung upon the slopes higher up. At the bottom was a small stream of very clear water, flowing on towards the Huisne, through

water-cresses and other plants of the brook, but now nearly frozen over, though towards the mid-course the quickness of the current, and perhaps the depth from which the fountain rose at no great distance, kept the water free from ice. A little wooden bridge spanned it over, leaving room for two horses abreast, but the old and congealed ruts at the side showed that the carts, which occasionally came along the road, passed through the stream itself; and some vehicle which had traversed the valley not long before had so far broken away the frozen surface of the rivulet, that the traveller had clear space to let his horse drink, before he crossed the bridge.

As he paused to do so, however, and slackened his rein for that purpose, he gazed round, and his eyes were quickly attracted by the sight of some objects *not* very pleasant to contemplate for a wayfarer in those days. About two hundred yards farther down the stream sat a party of some eight or nine men, with their horses tied by the foot, and feeding on the frosty grass as well as they could. Though the number was so

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However, as he himself, whatever his private opinions might be, bore no distinctive signs of either faction about him the traveller hoped that he might be suffered to pass unmolested, especi-

ally as his dress and appearance offered no great show of wealth ; and, therefore, without displaying the slightest concern or apprehension, he suffered his horse to conclude his draught, and then was preparing to resume his journey, when, after a brief consultation, one of the soldiers advanced at a quick pace on foot, and planted himself on the opposite side of the bridge, while another ran higher up the hill, and the rest rose slowly from the ground, and began to untie their horses.

All these movements were remarked by the traveller ; but still he maintained his air of easy carelessness, till the soldier who had placed himself opposite advanced a step or two towards him, exclaiming, in an impatient tone, as if irritated by his apathy, "*Qui vive ?*"

The farmer was not without his reply, however, though, to say "Long live the king," which he might be inclined to do, would have been a dangerous experiment, and he therefore replied, without the least hesitation, "*Vive la France !*"

"Come, come, master peasant, that will not do," exclaimed the other, advancing upon him,

pistol in hand ; "thou art some accursed *Politie* ! Are you for the Holy Union or Henry of Bourbon ?"

"Nay, good sir, do not be angry," replied the farmer ; "I am a poor man of no party. I have nothing to do with these matters at present, and mind only my own concerns."

"If thou art of no party," said the soldier, "thou art an enemy to both. So, get off thy horse ; I have a fancy for him."

"Nay, I pray you," cried the other, "do not take my beast. How am I to carry my corn ?"

"We will save you that trouble," rejoined the soldier, with the courtesy usual on such occasions ; "and if you have any weight of gold upon you, we will deliver you of that burden also. So, get off at once, Master What's-your-name, or I will send you off with a pistol-shot."

"My name is Chasseron," answered the peasant, "and a name well known for wronging no man ; but if I must get off and part with my poor beast, I pray you help me down with the corn, for I cannot dismount till it is away.—But if you will leave me the nag," he added, "I

will pay you his full value, if you will come to my place. He and I have been old friends, and I would fain not part with him."

"Get down ! get down !" cried the soldier impatiently. "Clumsy boor, can't you dismount with a sack behind you?" and at the same moment he came nearer and laid his hand upon the load.

The instant he did so, the farmer thrust his strong hand between his cuirass and his neck, half strangling him with his large knuckles ; and with his right drawing a pistol from his saddle-bow, he brought the muzzle close to his ear, exclaiming, " Now, master, I see you have some command, by your scarf. So if the way be not cleared very speedily, you shall go up or down as the case may be, without any brains in your skull. I've got one life under my fist, and they can but take one in return, so now we shall see how they love you. Don't struggle, or you shall soon struggle no more ; but turn round, tell them to get out of the way, and then march on with me to the top of the hill."

" I can't turn," said the soldier, in a rueful tone.

The man did so ; and, touching his horse gently with his heel, the stout farmer put him into a slow walk, while several of the marauders ran forward to see what was going on.

“ Bid them back !” cried Chasseron, jogging his companion’s head with the muzzle of his weapon. “ Bid them back, or you are a dead man, without shrift.”

“Keep off! keep off, Beauvois,” cried his adversary. “Keep off, La Motte, or by the Holy Virgin he will kill me!”

“That I will,” muttered Chasseron heartily ; and the soldiers halted for an instant as if to consult. But your good companion of those days was not very careful of a comrade’s life ; and it seemed to be soon agreed that the insolence of the farmer was not to be tolerated out of any consideration for the gentleman in his hands.

WILLIAM H. HARRIS

There was, therefore, some cocking of pistols and looking at pans, with various other indications of coming strife.

Chasseron, however, continued to advance, dragging his captive along, and keeping a watchful eye upon all the proceedings of the enemy, while the poor fellow in his hands shouted again and again to the hard ears of his companions to hold back for God's sake. They on their part paid little attention to his petitions; and, in a moment or two, several of the soldiers began to creep closer, in order to get within pistol-shot, while the rest mounted their horses as if to make an attack on the rear of the enemy. No sooner had the foremost of those on foot reached a fitting distance, than he began to take a deliberate aim at the horseman; but the latter, muttering to himself, "This is unpleasant, Pardie!" turned suddenly towards him, withdrew the pistol from the ear of the fellow whom he held, levelled it at the other, and fired. The man went down in a moment, his weapon discharging itself in the air as he fell.

At the same time the captive struggled hard in the hands of Chasseron, and, by a sudden effort, grasped his dagger to stab him before he could resist. But the farmer was still quicker in his movements, his other pistol was drawn in an instant and once more at his friend's head, and while two shots from the enemy passed close to him, one grazing his arm, the other going through his hat, he exclaimed, "Throw down the *daguer*, or you are a dead man !"

The order was obeyed in an instant; but it was repeated with regard to the sword, which was also cast to the ground at a word; and then to the surprise of the Leaguer, he was instantly set free.

"Now," cried Chasseron, "I give you your life. Run back as hard as you can to your comrades; and, if you have any command over them, bid them leave off attacking a man who never did them any harm."

His prisoner required not two biddings to take to his heels; and the good farmer, setting spurs to his horse, galloped up the hill as

hard as he could go, while the men who had mounted pursued him, at full speed, firing at him as he went, and the soldier, who had at first ran on upon the road, cast himself in the way, prepared to stop his advance.

As it was now a flight and pursuit, one moment was a matter of life and death to the farmer; and as he rode on upon the enemy before him, he levelled his remaining pistol and fired. Though now at full speed, his aim was not less true than before; but the ball striking his adversary's steel cap in an oblique direction, glanced off without wounding him, and the soldier fired in turn without effect. Drawing his sword, the farmer galloped on; but he had to do with a resolute and powerful opponent in the man who barred the way; the others were coming up at a furious pace, and the life of poor Master Chasseron was in no light peril, when suddenly a party of four horsemen, well mounted and armed, appeared on the top of the hill, riding quickly, as if attracted by the report of the firearms.

Now they might be friends, or they might

be enemies; but Chasseron determined to look upon them as the former, till they proved themselves otherwise; and, waving his hand towards them, he cried, "Help! help! Hurrah!" and, as his antagonist in front turned to see who they were, he let fall a blow on his cap, which brought him on his knee. The farmer was obliged instantly to wheel, however, to defend himself against those who followed; and with wonderful strength and agility he crossed swords with one, threw his discharged pistol at the face of another, knocking out some of his front teeth, and watched a third, who was somewhat behind.

However unequal might be the combat, he maintained it gallantly, while the appearance of the fresh party, now galloping down at full speed, made his enemies hesitate in their operations. Nor was the cry of "Vive le Roi!" which came from the advancing cavaliers, nor the sight of the white scarfs with which they were decorated, calculated to reassure the Leaguers. The men who had remained below on foot, however, now rushed up; and, with-

drawing from the attack upon the farmer to meet the more honourable adversaries who were by this time close upon them, they attempted to give some little array to their front, and to recharge their pistols.

But before this could be done, the new comers were amongst them; Chasseron turned to give his powerful aid; white scarfs and green were mingled together in a moment; and, after a brief struggle, the Leaguers were driven down into the valley with the loss of two of their number. After attempting to make a stand at the bridge they were put to flight; and springing from their horses, the men who had mounted followed the example of those on foot, and took refuge in the wood, whither the victors did not think fit to pursue them. As soon as it was clear that resistance had ceased, the successful party halted by the stream, surrounding the good peasant with whom the strife began; while he, on his part, hat in hand, thanked them heartily for his deliverance.

“ Parbleu !” he exclaimed, “if you had not

come up, Monsieur, I should have lost my wheat and my money too. I had killed one of them, and might have got the better of two more; but I do not think I could have managed all the seven."

These words were addressed to a young gentleman apparently not more than one or two and twenty years of age. His complexion was pale, but clear; his eyes dark and thoughtful; his deep brown hair waving from under his hat, for he wore no defensive arms, and his short beard curling round his mouth and chin. All the features of his face were remarkably fine and delicate, but the forehead was broad and high, and the eyebrows strongly marked. His whole air, and the expression of his countenance, were grave and thoughtful; and although he had led the others in their charge with gallant determination, yet it had been with calm coolness which displayed not the slightest sign of vehemence or emotion. The quick-eyed farmer had remarked also that he had contented himself with driving back the enemy, and defending his own person, without

striking at any one or using the pistols with which his saddlebow was garnished. In person he was tall and well made, though neither much above the ordinary height, nor apparently particularly robust. His carriage, however, was graceful; and he sat his horse with ease and power, managing it during the combat as if well accustomed to the tilt-yard if not to the battle field, and drawing it suddenly up by the side of the stream when he saw that the other party had betaken themselves to the wood.

To the address of the good countryman he replied briefly, saying, "You are very welcome, my good sir; though I am not fond of such affairs, nor much habituated to them. Neither are you, I should suppose; and yet you seem to have defended yourself skilfully and vigorously.—Are you not hurt?"

"Not a whit!" answered the farmer; "and as to defending myself, that's an old trade of mine; I have borne arms in my day, though I have given that occupation up for the present; but there is many a man in the army

remembers Michael Chasseron. I did not wish to hurt any one, if they would have let me pass quietly; so what they have got is their own fault. And now we may as well see to their baggage: there may be curious things amongst it."

"That you may do if you like," replied the young gentleman; "neither I nor my servants can have anything to do with plunder."

"Nor I either," answered the farmer; "I am always content with my own, if I could but get it; but these good men may have other things upon them besides gold and silver. Papers, young gentleman, papers which may be serviceable to the King; and for those, by your good leave, I will look, begging you to stand by me for a minute or two, lest our friends come out from their hiding-holes again."

"Willingly, willingly," said his companion, "that is a laudable object, and in that we will help you." Thus saying he dismounted himself, and bidding two of his servants do the same, proceeded with Chasseron to search the bodies of those who had fallen, three horses

which remained tied to a tree, and some baggage which had been left on the ground where the Leaguers had been sitting.

In a small leather bag buckled on the back of one of the chargers was found a packet of letters and papers regarding the movements of various bodies of men, which the good farmer examined with a curious eye. He then handed them to the young gentleman, who had come down to his assistance, saying, "You had better take them to the King, sir."

"Nay," replied the stranger, "take them yourself, my good friend; I am not going to the camp; and if this intelligence be of importance you may get rewarded."

The farmer shook his head, laughing. "His Majesty," he said, "has scarcely money, I hear, to buy himself a dinner. But I will take them, for if I don't go myself, I will ensure that he gets them; and now let us look at that fellow I cut over the head upon the hill, if we leave him there, he will be frozen to death to-night, and that would be scarce christian."

On approaching the spot where the man lay,

they found him still alive, though bleeding and stunned by the blow he had received. After some consultation they took him up and placed him across one of the Leaguers' horses; and Chasseron then laid his hand upon his brow, saying thoughtfully, "Where shall we take him? The nearest place is Marzay, M. de Liancourt's château; but I don't rightly know whether they will give me shelter there for the night; and this business has stopped me so, that I shall not be able to get to Marolles before dark."

"Oh I will answer for your welcome, my good friend," replied the young gentleman, "I am going to Marzay myself; M. de Liancourt is my uncle."

"Well then, we will come along," replied the farmer, mounting his horse again; and, the wounded man being given into the charge of one of the gentleman's servants, they rode on up the hill, Chasseron keeping in front with the leader of the party.

After they had gone about two hundred yards at a slow pace, the farmer turned towards his

companion, who had fallen into a silent reverie, and looking in his face for a moment he said, "I could almost swear I have seen you somewhere before; but yet I know that can't be, for it is some fifteen years ago."

"I must have been a child then," replied the cavalier, "for I have yet to see three-and-twenty."

"It was your father, I suppose," continued Chasseron, "he was then a young man, and you are as like him as one leaf on a tree is to another."

"What might be his name?" asked the stranger, with a faint smile; "give me that, and I will soon tell you if it was my father."

"That is easily done," replied the farmer; "his name was Louis de la Grange, Baron de Montigni. He was a good soldier, and a good man."

"You are right," said the young gentleman; "such was my father's name, and such was his character; but he has been dead now more than ten years."

"Ah, so I heard," answered Chasseron; "we

must all die, and the great reaper generally takes the best ears, and leaves the worthless ones standing. I am glad to see his son, however.—But how comes it, sir, that you are not with the King? Many a man younger than you fought at Arques, I believe.”

“That is not improbable,” replied De Montigni; “but my uncle sent me to Padua to study, and laid his injunctions on me to remain there. Neither, to say the truth, did I feel much inclination to take part in all this strife, at least so long as the present King was in arms against his sovereign.”

“Parbleu! I do not see how he could help it,” cried Chasseron; “if he could not believe the Catholic doctrines, and they held a dagger to his throat and bade him swear he did believe them, he had but one choice, either to tell a lie, or knock the dagger out of their hands.”

“I do not blame him,” replied the young nobleman, “and for that very reason I felt unwilling either to take arms for my King or against him. Besides, I have friends on both sides, am not very fond of shedding blood, and,

to tell the truth, my friend, I found better society amongst the dead than amongst the living. I mean—”

“Oh, I understand what you mean,” answered the farmer: “you mean you loved your books better than hard blows.”

The young gentleman’s cheek grew somewhat red; “I am not afraid of blows,” he said, “and I think you have had no occasion to suppose so.”

“Pardie, no !” replied Chasseron frankly; “and I should not blame you if you were. I am a very peaceable man myself, when men will let me alone; and I desire nothing but to enjoy my own in tranquillity; so if you could find peace at Padua with Horace, and Cicero, and Virgil, you were quite right to take it.”

“You seem to know something of such studies,” said the young Baron de Montigni, with a smile.

“Oh yes,” replied Chasseron: “I see you judge by externals alone, my young friend; and because I am here a poor cultivator of the soil, you think that I am a mere peasant; but I am of gentle blood like yourself—hold my

own land, what is left of it; and your friend Virgil should have taught you that there is no degradation in agriculture; so that, though I have for a time beaten my sword into a reaping-hook, I am not a bit the worse gentleman for that."

"Nay, God forbid," replied the young gentleman, "I hold it one of the most honourable employments a man can follow; but you must not censure me for seeking occupation in my books, as you say, while you seek occupation in your fields."

"There is some difference, however," replied Chasseron; "in living with the dead as you say, you cut yourself off from doing good to the living, which ought to be the great object of each man's life. You may tell me, that amongst those great men, those sages of antiquity, you can best learn how to live, and gain precepts to be applied to your future conduct; but there is a danger in being too long a learner; and, in studying precepts all your life, you may forget ever to apply them. Each man has duties, and those of busy times like these are active ones."

One's king, one's country, one's friends, one's relations, one's fellow-citizens, all have claims upon us which the dead have not; and the exercise of our abilities affords lessons for our conduct, to which all the maxims of philosophers and moralists are but bubbles."

"Methinks," replied De Montigni, "that the cultivator of the soil is not much more called into active life than the cultivator of letters."

"Your pardon, your pardon, worthy sir," answered the farmer; "he is always mingling with his fellow-creatures; he is ever ready to take his part with the rest when need shall be; he is daily benefiting mankind, and not spending his life in studying how; he is still learning more, even while he is enacting much; and, by the practice of what is right, he learns to do it well."

The young gentleman smiled gaily, but changed the subject, saying, "Perhaps you are right; but now tell me, as you seem to have studied all these things deeply, and most likely have lived with your eyes open to all that has taken place, what has been doing here of late,

and what is the real state of France? for, but imperfect and maimed accounts reach us in foreign lands, perverted by the prejudices of men, and coloured by all the passions of the relaters. Nor have I indeed paid much attention to what I heard, till I was summoned back by my uncle; for the only tidings that reached us, came through the League, except once or twice, when some Royalists passed by Venice."

"Your question is a wide one," replied Chaserson, "and I should have to write a history to tell you. It is but needful to say, that France is growing tired of the League; men are recovering from the fever which had driven them mad. The King, now with many, now with few, is still gaining ground on his enemies; but his friends are sometimes more mischievous to him than his foes. Half the Catholics serve him coldly, intrigue in his very camp, his court, and at his table, because he is a heretic. The Huguenots murmur and complain because he is obliged to buy, bribe, and reward their adversaries. Both fight well when there is a battle or a siege, but both are well inclined to leave him when he is

obliged to spend his time in those slow and difficult movements, which are no less necessary in a campaign than the combat or the storming party. In the meanwhile, fed with foreign gold, supported by foreign troops, confederated with the implacable enemies of the land, and slaughtering Frenchmen with the swords of the Spaniard, the only hold which the League have upon the people of France is the frail pretext of religion, the almost incurable anarchy into which they have thrown the country, and the possession of a number of towns and fortresses, lands, governments, and territories, which those who have grasped them are unwilling to resign, and know they can only retain so long as this great serpent of the League remains uncrushed."

"But let me hear," rejoined the young baron, "if you can tell me, why, when the King had Paris at his mercy, he did not make himself master of it. If I have been informed aright, he could have taken it in an hour?"

"Perhaps he might," replied Chasseron, "and yet he did not. I think it was very

foolish of him, for my part; but still there would have been terrible bloodshed, many thousands of good citizens would have perished, the capital would have been a scene of slaughter, violence, and devastation, such as the world has seldom witnessed. After all, perhaps it is as well for a King not to do all that a king can do; and yet the Parisians deserved no great mercy at his hands. But he, poor foolish man, chose rather to wander about fighting here and fighting there, sleeping hard, sometimes half starved, and working day and night, than take their beds from under these rebellious citizens, or give their wives and daughters up to his soldiers."

"And he was right," cried Montigni warmly, "and God will bless him for it. If I am not much mistaken, that act will set him firmly on the throne of France."

"Perhaps so," said the farmer, "but old soldiers get hardened to such things, and men do marvel and grumble too, that when he could have terminated this long and desolating war by one bold and severe stroke, he should have he-

sitated for the sake of the most rebellious race in France. There is much to be said on either side, and I am inclined to think myself that the King was wrong, though I was of a different opinion at the time."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his young companion, "what has made you change your views so quickly then?"

"Thought," answered the farmer, "thought, which may be as often the comrade of the soldier in the camp or on the march, or of the farmer in the field, if he likes to seek it, as of the pale student over his book. No man need be without thought; and the active man, the man of life and movement, acquires often a power of rapid but no less certain calculation, which the slow ponderer of the cabinet can never gain. I now believe, Monsieur de Montigni, upon farther consideration, that though there might have been much bloodshed in the streets of Paris, had it been taken when it was besieged, though even the Catholic soldiers would have been difficult to restrain, and the Huguenots would have remembered St. Bar-

tholomew, yet the amount of slaughter will be greater,—nay, perhaps has been greater already, by the protraction of the war, than if Henry had blown the gates open, and led his army into the heart of the capital.”

“It was an amiable weakness, if it was one,” replied De Montigni; “but see, what a splendid scene we are coming upon, while the evening sun pours such a flood of purple over the grey waves of the wintry forest.”

“Ay, indeed, it is a lovely land, this France,” said Chasseron, and rich as it is lovely, if men would but be content to enjoy the bounties which God gives, without carving out for themselves miseries and contentions which frustrate all the benevolent purposes of the Most High. Who that looks over such a prospect as that would think that, in every village and in every field, in the wood and in the plain, is strife and bloodshed, anarchy and crime, sown by the virulent passions and intolerant bigotry of those for whose especial blessing such glories were created? Out upon it! it almost makes one a misanthrope. However,

there stands Marzay, not half a mile distant, with people walking on the ramparts. Who may they be, I wonder?"

"I can divine without seeing their faces," answered the young baron; "there are the garments of a lady, and a priest's robes, and a pourpoint, on the gold lace of which the sun's setting rays are glistening. They are sweet Rose d'Albret, daughter of the Count de Marennes, who was killed at Poitiers, and good father Walter de la Tremblade; and either my uncle De Liancourt, or the good old commander, or, more likely still, my cousin Chazeul."

"Well," rejoined Chasseron, after a short pause, "I trust to your warranty, Monsieur de Montigni; for I am not very sure that my having killed a Leaguer or two will be my best recommendation; no, nor, *ventre saint gris*, your white scarf the surest passport to favour in Marzay. Your uncle is one of those we call *Politics*, who are more afraid to espouse openly a cause they know to be just, than the Leaguers to uphold one they know to be unjust; and, as

for Monsieur de Chazeul, why he is one of the pillars of the Holy Union."

"I'll be your surety," replied De Montigni, who was beginning to take no slight pleasure in the conversation of his frank companion. "They shall give you a hearty welcome, or I will hardly take one for myself, which they would not like; so never fear."

"Nay, I fear not," answered his companion drily: and they accordingly rode on towards the gates, which lay straight before them.

De Montigni, however, fell into a fit of deep musing as they approached, and bent his eyes steadfastly upon the ground, though the persons who were walking on the ramparts above stopped as he drew near, and a fair lady waved her hand as if in welcome.

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CHAPTER III.

By the reader's good leave, we must go up for a moment or two to the ramparts of the Château of Marzay, and introduce him to the party there, before the new comers arrive. Nay, more, we must return for nearly an hour, and listen to the conversation which was taking place while all the events we have just narrated were occurring in the wood that lay beneath the eyes of those upon the castle walls, though it must be premised, that those events had been completely hidden from their sight by the thin veil of forest boughs; as the various turns of fate, upon which the fortunes of our whole future life depend, are often going on close by us, concealed from our gaze, whether anxious or unconscious, by the ripple of an idle current of trifling things that affect us not permanently in any way.

The Baron de Montigni, though five or six years had elapsed since he last saw any of the party there assembled, had, by his previous knowledge of the circumstances, divined aright the names of the persons of which it was composed. About an hour and a half before sunset, a very beautiful girl of eighteen or nineteen had come forth upon the walls for her afternoon walk, having on one hand a gentleman dressed in the height of the extravagant fashions of the day, with a high starched ruff, or *fraise*, as it was called, which made his head look like that of John the Baptist in a charger, and with a slashed and laced pourpoint of yellow velvet, stiffly embroidered with silver. His shoes were of white satin, enriched with a rosette of yellow; and in his girdle hung a small dagger knife, with a fretted hilt of gold, while far behind hung his sword, as if put out of reach of his hand lest he should use it too frequently. His beard was pointed, and neatly trimmed; his hair curled, and turned back from his face; and on the top of his head he wore a small velvet toque, with a single long

feather. In person he was tall, and not ungraceful, though somewhat stiff; and his features were all good, though there was certainly something in the disposition of them which gave a sinister and unpleasant expression to his countenance. Perhaps this effect was produced by the closeness of the eyes and the narrowness of the brows, which produced a shrewd and confined look, though his face might otherwise have been prepossessing.

Though dressed with such scrupulous care, his air and manner was not that of a fop. It was not easy and unrestrained, indeed, but it was bold and confident; and if one might judge — as we almost all do judge — from manner and appearance, pride, rather than vanity, was his prevailing folly; shrewd ambition, rather than levity, the characteristic vice. Yet, as we shall see, he was not without lightness, too; but it was often used in those days as a means to an end, and covered too frequently intense selfishness under an air of idle indifference.

On the other side of the young lady walked, to and fro with her upon the rampart, a man

considerably passed the middle age, dressed in the habit of the clergy. His hair was almost white, though here and there a streak of a darker hue showed that it had been once jet black. His features were fine, though apparently worn with care and thought; and the expression of his countenance was grave, calm, and almost stern. His large dark eyes were, indeed, full of light, but it was not of that kind which illuminates what is within for the gaze of others, but it rather fell dazzling upon those who were his companions for the time, searching the secrets of their hearts, and displaying none of his own. His lips were thin and pale; his cheek delicate and hollow, but with a slight tinge of red, which by its varying intensity, from time to time gave the only indication to be obtained of strong emotions in his bosom.

But we must speak of the lady, for truly she deserves some notice, were it but for her beauty. There were, however, other things to be remarked in her besides the fine and delicate features, the graceful and rounded limbs, the bright complexion, the fair skin, the

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tangles of her luxuriant dark brown hair, the heaving bosom, or the perfect symmetry of the neck and shoulders. In the large, soft hazel eyes, under their jetty fringes, on the warm arching lips, and in the dimple of the cheek, shone forth a gay and bright spirit, which, perhaps, under some circumstances might have been full of playful jest and light-hearted merriment; but, as it was, the light was subdued and shaded almost to sad thoughtfulness. It seemed as if cares and anxieties, if not sorrows and misfortunes, had come upon her young; or as if those with whom her early years had been spent, had laboured to repress, rather than moderate, the joyous buoyancy of youth, and had brought a cloud over the sunshine of girlhood.

It was not exactly so, indeed; but living in troublous times, when the mind became familiar with great but tragic acts, and every day brought some subject for deep and anxious thought, and passing her life in comparative seclusion with people older than herself,—not very wise nor very considerate, though not ac-

tually domineering and austere,—her cheerfulness had been repressed, though not extinguished, and a shade of sadness brought over her demeanour, rendering it various and changeful like an April day. Her dress was rich and tasteful, according to the fashion of the times, but more in the style of the fair and unhappy queen of Scotland, than of the harsh and masculine Elizabeth. There were no gaudy colours; indeed there was no great display of embroidery; but the lace which waved over her fair bosom and rose round her snowy neck, was of the finest and most costly kind; and the black velvet of her dress was here and there looped with pearls.

When first she came forth, by a door that led over a small bridge to the inner parts of the dwelling, she paused at the edge of the wall for a moment, and gazed over the scene around. Youth is generally more fond of contemplating nature's handiwork than age. Mature life is usually spent in dealing with man and man's acts; the face of nature comes upon us then as an impression rather than a subject

of contemplation. To the young, it is full of interest and of wonder; imagination robes it in her own garmenture of light, peoples each shady dell, fills the forest with her own creations, and calls up in each village or church or tower a wild and agitated throng of feelings and sensations, of hopes and fears, all the beings of the fancy, ephemeral though bright, confused though lively, impalpable though vivid. Youth sees more than the landscape,—age sees it as it is; the one has its own sun-shine, to adorn all it looks upon; the other views everything under the shady cloud.

Rose d'Albret stopped to gaze; then, notwithstanding the chilliness of the wintry air, she turned her eyes to the east over the gray lines, where the vanguard of the night was marching forward over the sky, and then looked round to the west, where the rear of day was all glittering with golden light. What made her sigh? what made her fix her eyes upon a thin white film of mist that rose up from the deeper parts of the forest, like the smoke of a heath-burner's fire? Who can say? who

can trace along the magic chain of association, link by link, and tell how the objects within her sight connected themselves in her mind with her own situation, and made her remember that she had much to regret?

"You are thoughtful to-night, Rose," said the Marquis de Chazeul.

"And may a woman never be thoughtful, Chazeul?" asked Rose d'Albret. "If such be your creed, pray seek another wife, for you will often find me so, I assure you."

"Nay," replied Chazeul, "I would not disappoint you so for the world, sweet Rose; it would break your little heart if I were to take you at your word."

"No, indeed," replied the young lady, with perfect calmness; "you are quite mistaken, Chazeul, my heart is not so easily broken; and, as for disappointment, it would be none at all; I am in that happy state, that, whatever be the event, I can bear it with calmness."

"Or at all events, with affected indifference," replied her companion, a little nettled, "is it not so, Rose?"

"Not at all," she answered; "you never saw me affect anything that I did not feel. Here is father Walter, who has known me as long and better than yourself, can witness for me. Did you ever see me pretend to anything that is not real, Monsieur de la Tremblade?"

"Never, my dear child," replied the priest; "and I should think Monsieur de Chazeul should be very well content to see you willing to give your hand to him according to your guardian's commands. In the first place, it shows that obedient disposition, on which so much of a husband's happiness depends; and in the next place, it leaves him the sweet task of teaching you to love him."

"That is, if he can," said Rose d'Albret, with a smile; "but do you know, my good father," she continued, "I would draw another inference from the facts, which is simply this, that it would be better for Monsieur de Chazeul to give me longer time to learn that same lesson of love, and not to press forward this same marriage so hastily."

"Nay, on my life," answered Chazeul, "it

is Monsieur de Liancourt's doing, not mine; but I will acknowledge, sweet Rose, that my eagerness to possess so fair a flower may make me anxious to gather it without delay, though my impatience may make me prick my fingers with the thorns, as I have done just now."

"Well, I am in the hands of others," said Rose d'Albret; "I have nothing to do but to obey; and doubtless, in hurrying this matter forward, my guardian does what he thinks best for me."

"He may have many reasons, dear daughter," said the priest; "he is old; times are troublesome and dangerous; none can tell what a day may bring forth; and it is a part of his duty to see you married and under the protection of a younger and more active man than himself, before he is called to quit this busy scene."

"Oh, I think, good father, I could protect myself," replied Rose d'Albret. "Those thorns my cousin De Chazeul talks of, would be quite hedge enough, I should imagine,—but hark, there are guns in the wood—and there again!"

All listened, and two or three more shots were distinctly heard.

"I thought we had a truce here?" said Rose d'Albret.

"True, amongst ourselves," answered the Marquis de Chazeul; "but we cannot get others always to observe it; and 'tis not unlikely that these are a party of Henry de Bourbon's heretic soldiers wandering about, and committing some of their usual acts of violence and plunder. He is now besieging Dreux, I find."

"Why, I have always heard," said Rose d'Albret, "that the King is strict and scrupulous in restraining his soldiers from such excesses."

"The King?" exclaimed Chazeul, with his lip curling. "Pray call him some other name, sweet Rose. He may be a king of heretics, but he is no king of mine, nor of any other Catholics."

"Hush, hush!" cried Walter de la Tremblade, "you must not let Monsieur de Liancourt hear you make such rash speeches. He

acknowledges him as King of right, though not in fact,—his religion being the only bar.”

“And that an insurmountable one,” said the Marquis; “if he were to profess himself converted to-morrow, who would believe him? I am sure not I.”

“Nay, cousin,” replied Rose d’Albret, “one who is so frank and free, so true to all men, so strict a keeper of his word as the King is reported to be, would never falsify the truth in that. Remember, too, I am his humble cousin; for the counts of Marennes come from the same stock as the old kings of Navarre.”

“Ay, a hundred degrees removed,” said Chazeul; “I have no fear, dear Rose, of your blood being contaminated by his.”

“Well, it matters not,” replied Rose d’Albret, with a laugh; “I intend to fall in love with him whenever I see him.”

“It might be better,” observed Chazeul, “to try that with your husband.”

“Oh no,” cried his fair companion gaily; “that would be quite contrary to all rule,

Chazeul, especially amongst the ladies and gentlemen of the League. As far as I have heard, they have done away with all such foolish old customs; and loyalty to their king, or love between husband and wife are amongst the errors of the past, which they quite repudiate." Chazeul bit his lip, and she went on, "I should like to see this King, he is so gallant and so noble, I am sure I should love him—is he very handsome, Monsieur de Chazeul?"

"I never saw him, Mademoiselle," answered the Marquis, somewhat bitterly, "except at such a distance that one could discover nothing but the white plume in his hat, and on his horse's head."

"I have seen him often, long ago," said the priest, "when he was a mere youth, at the court of the Queen Mother; and then he was as handsome a boy as ever my eyes lighted upon, with a skin so delicately soft, and such a warm colour in his cheek, one would have thought him little fitted for the rough, laborious, and perilous life he has since led."

"Hark! there are guns again," exclaimed

Rose d'Albret; and a sudden cloud came over her brow. "I hope these people," she continued, after a moment's pause, "are not attacking my cousin De Montigni."

"They will soon make an end of him if they do," said Chazeul; "at least I should suppose so."

"You seem very indifferent to the matter," observed the lady quickly; "why do you imagine so?"

"Simply because a book-read student, who has been passing the best part of his life within the walls of a college, can be no match for men of courage and of action," replied Chazeul.

"Fie," replied Rose d'Albret warmly; "Louis de Montigni has as much courage as any one. I can remember him before he went abroad, a wild rash boy, who used to frighten me by the daring things he did. But if you had any kindness in your nature, Chazeul, you would go out to help him—in case it be he who is attacked. He must be on the road even now; I wonder he is not arrived."

"I will go and speak with Monsieur de

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Liancourt about it," replied Chazeul; and, leaving the priest and the lady together, he retired for a short time from the walls.

"Let us listen," said Rose d'Albret; and, leaning her arm upon the stone-work, she turned her ear towards the wood, bending down her bright eyes upon the ground, while the priest advanced, and standing beside her gazed at her for a moment, and then looked out over the country beyond.

During the whole conversation which had taken place, he had watched her closely; and, well acquainted with her character from infancy, he had read aright all that was passing in her mind. He saw that the coldness which she displayed towards the man selected for her future husband was no assumed indifference, none of that coquettish excitement which many a woman learns too early to administer to the passion of a favoured lover, none of that holding back which is intended to lead forward, none of that reluctance which is affected but to be overcome. He perceived clearly enough that she was indifferent to him, and perhaps somewhat more; that

she felt for him no respect—but little esteem ; and, though accustomed for some years to his society from time to time, and habituated to look upon her marriage with him as an act that was to be, that she now began to feel repugnance as the time approached for performing the contract, which had been entered into by others without her knowledge or consent. In short, he saw that, though she would obey, it would be unwillingly.

The priest regretted that it was so ; for he felt no slight affection towards her, though, as too often happens, he was ready to do all he could, from other considerations, to promote a sacrifice which might destroy the happiness of one he loved almost as a child. The knowledge that she was indifferent towards Chazeul might grieve him, but it did not in the least induce him to pause in the course he had determined to pursue ; and he proceeded, after a few moments given to thought, to draw forth her sentiments further, while, at the same time, he endeavoured to work some change in her opinions.

"He is certainly very handsome," said the priest abruptly; "do you not think so?"

"Who?" cried D'Albret, with a start. "Oh, Chazeul! Yes, perhaps he is; and yet not handsome either."

"Indeed," said Walter de la Tremblade, "I think I never saw finer features, or a more graceful form."

"No, not graceful, surely," said the young lady. "Well-proportioned, perhaps, and his features are all good, it is true; but yet, father, there is something that makes him not handsome."

"What?" asked the priest.

"Nay, I cannot well tell," answered Made-moiselle d'Albret; "perhaps it is that his eyes are too close together—but I was thinking of De Montigni, good father; I hope no mischance has befallen him."

"Oh, I trust not!" answered her companion. "And so, Rose, this is the only fault you can find with your lover's beauty, that his eyes are too close together! I can assure you, sweet lady, that the fair dames of Paris do not per-

ceive that defect, and that you may have some trouble to keep the heart you have won."

"I wish—" said Rose d'Albret, but then she broke off suddenly, leaving the sentence unconcluded, and beginning again afresh, she added, "Heaven knows, good father, that I took no pains to win his love; and perhaps the best way to retain it when I am his wife, if ever that happens, will be to take no pains to keep it."

"It will then be a duty to take pains," answered the priest, somewhat sternly; "we are not born, my daughter, in this life, to seek nothing but our own pleasure and happiness. We are here to fulfil the important tasks assigned us by the Almighty, and clearly pointed out to us by the circumstances in which we are placed. To neglect them is sinful, to perform them coldly is reprehensible; and it is our greatest wisdom, as well as our strictest duty, to labour that our inclinations may go hand in hand with the performance of that which God has given us to do."

"Nay," said Rose, laying her hand gently on the sleeve of his gown, "you speak severely,

good father. I do not see how it is so clearly pointed out that I should marry Nicholas de Chazeul; and I do wish that the ceremony were not hurried in this way. However, if I do wed him, depend upon it I shall follow your counsel, and do my best to love him. At all events," she added, raising her head somewhat proudly, "you may be sure, that under no circumstance will I forget what is due to him and to myself. I may be an unhappy wife, but I will never be a bad one."

"That I doubt not, that I doubt not," said the priest warmly; "but what I wish to point out to you is, the way to happiness, daughter; and depend upon it you can but find it in doing your duty cheerfully."

"I know it, my excellent friend," answered Rose, "and it shall be my endeavour so to act; but I could much desire before I take a vow to love any one, that I had some better means of knowing how far I can fulfil it."

"Oh! if you have the will to do so," answered father Walter, "it may easily be done."

"What !" she cried eagerly, "easy to love a man one cannot esteem or respect ! I say not that such is the case in the present instance, father," she continued, seeing her companion fix his eyes upon her with a look of surprise and inquiry ; "I only state a case that might be. Suppose I were to find him cold, selfish, heartless, cruel, vicious, base, how should I love him then ?"

"But Monsieur de Chazeul is none of these," rejoined the priest.

"I say not that he is," answered Rose d'Albret ; "I only say he may be for aught I know. I knew him not in youth ; and in manhood I have seen him twice or thrice a year in circles where all men wear a mask. I would fain see him with his face bare, good father."

"Few women ever so see their lovers," rejoined the priest ; "love is the greatest of all hypocrites."

"Perhaps that is true," said Rose ; "yet time, if a woman's eyes be unblinded by her own feelings, does generally, soon or late, draw back the covering of the heart, so far as to show

her some of the features. I have seen little : I would see more ; for what I have seen makes me doubt."

"Indeed !" exclaimed her companion, "what have you perceived to raise suspicions? Some casual word, some slight jest, I warrant you ; such as he spoke just now about his cousin. Idle words, daughter ! idle words, upon which you must put no harsh interpretation."

"How often idle words betray the spirit within !" said Rose. "They are the careless jailers which let the prisoner forth out of his secret dungeon. They have cost many a king his crown, if history be true ; many a woman reputation, ay, and perhaps, many a lover his lady's hand. But what I wish is to hear more than idle words, to see more than a masked face ; and, I do beseech you, aid me to delay this marriage for a time. Why was I not told earlier? Why was all arranged without my knowledge? Louis de Montigni has been summoned back more than a month, and yet I have had but one week, one poor week, allowed me to prepare my thoughts, to nerve my heart for the

great change of woman's existence. Marriage, to man, is but a pageant, a ball, a festival. To us, it is one of the sole events. It is birth or death to woman. I do beseech you, father, if you have ever loved me, if you have watched over my youth, counselled me rightly, enlightened and instructed my mind, led me on in honour, virtue, faith—I do beseech you, aid me but to delay this ceremony. I feel not rightly here," and she laid her hand upon her bosom.

"I cannot promise to do so, my sweet child," replied the priest. "The marriage is decided; your guardian's word is given; and I cannot but think it may be well for all, that the final seal be put to the engagement as soon as may be."

"Do you?" said Mademoiselle d'Albret; but there she stopped, for at that moment Chazeul appeared again at a little distance; and Walter de la Tremblade advanced towards him. The next moment, however, she murmured to herself, "They have gained him; and I am alone!"

A change came over her from that instant, and when, after speaking a word together, the

other two rejoined her, she was cheerful if not gay.

"The Count declares it is some loose party stealing the deer," said Chazeul, as he approached; "and thought it needless to send out to see, as, in these days, when one can hardly secure the corn of one's fields, or the fruits of one's vineyard, it were a vain hope to keep the game of one's woods."

"Well, he knows best," replied Rose d'Albret; "and now, good cousin of Chazeul, do tell me, what is to be the fate of France? How often is your great friend the Duke to be defeated, before he succeeds in crushing heresy, excluding the King from the throne, and putting some one on that thorny seat instead?"

"He will be defeated, as you term it, no more, fair lady," answered the Marquis; "for if report speaks true, he is even now marching against Henry of Bourbon with a force that shall crush him and his apostates, as men tread down an ants' nest."

"Indeed?" asked his fair companion; "then there will be a battle soon?"

"Within three days, men think," replied Chazeul.

"And of course you will be present?" said Rose d'Albret.

But the colour rose in her lover's cheek while he replied, "Nay, I cannot quit my bride and give up my bridal for any cause."

"True! men would say it was an ungallant gallantry," she replied; "and yet ladies love heroic acts I have heard. God help us! We women, I believe, but little know what we would have."

"That is very true," said the priest; "and, therefore, fair daughter, it is wisely arranged that others should decide for them."

"Perhaps so," answered the lady; "but one thing is certain, they would do so, whether it were better for us or not."

They then walked on once or twice along the whole range of the rampart without speaking, each seemingly busy with thoughts which they did not choose to utter; till at length the lady resumed the conversation on a new theme: "Methinks, cousin of Chazeul, the court in its

days of splendour, must have been a gay place."

"It was, indeed," replied the Marquis, glad of a subject which enabled him to speak more freely; "I know nought so brilliant on the face of the earth as was the court of Henry of Valois, some five years before his death; but I trust ere long we shall see a monarch who will hold as bright a one, without displaying his weaknesses; and then I trust Rose de Chazeul will shine amongst the very first in splendour, and in beauty."

"I am determined," she answered, with a smile, "if ever I appear at the court, to have a coronet of diamonds fashioned into roses, to bear out my name."

"Oh, trust to me," cried Chazeul, "trust to me, to find devices which shall make you out-shine the Queen."

"Ha! there come a party over the hills," cried Mademoiselle d'Albret. "It is De Montigni, I am sure;" and running forward to the edge of the rampart, she looked forth; but, as

she did so, she murmured, "Do they think to buy and sell me for a goldsmith's toy?"

Her two companions joined her in a moment; and, as the party approached, she waved her hand as we have before related, gaily beckoning her cousin. He did not raise his eyes, however; and with an air of some mortification, she said, "He will not look up!"

"He is bashful," said Chazeul; "too much study makes but a timid gentleman."

"So they say," replied Rose d'Albret; "but let us in and meet him at all events."

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was an old hall in the Château de Marzay, very like many another old hall in many parts both of France and England, some forty feet in span, some seventy in length, arched over with a concave roof, nearly semicircular in the curve, and not at all unlike, with its rounded ribs, the tilt of an enormous waggon. From the line where the vault sprang from the walls, ten or twelve large beams projected, ornamented at the ends with curiously carved and somewhat grotesque heads, supporting each an upright, upon which the arches of the roof rested, while diagonal beams gave additional strength to this sort of permanent scaffolding. The floor, as was usual in such chambers, was of polished tiles, alternately octangular and square; and seven large windows, with very

small panes set in lead, gave light to the interior.

This hall was the favourite place, in all the castle, of its Lord, Anthony Lefevre, Count de Liancourt, a gentleman allied to some of the first families in France, who had served in former wars with tolerable reputation, showing a greater lack of judgment than of courage; the latter quality leading him into many dangers, from which he had been saved, more by the skill and resolution of his friends and followers, than his own discretion. Comparatively few of the vices of man do not spring from his weaknesses. It is still the contest between the stronger and the feebler parts of our nature which overthrows us; and whether the passion be vanity or pride or avarice or ambition, or any of all the host of minor fiends against which we pray, it is solely by weakness of the higher qualities, placed to guard the heart in opposition to them, that either or all gain the ascendancy. We do not have a care to fortify the garrison betimes, as we might do, and the enemy takes us by siege, or storm, or escalade.

The Count de Liancourt had been all his life a weak man, and the passion which triumphed the most frequently over him was vanity ; but he had sufficient talent, which is very far from incompatible with weakness, to conceal from the eyes of those who did not know him to the very heart, the feebleness of his character. The suggestions of other people he passed for the result of his own deliberations, and he adhered to these adopted children with all the fondness of a parent. Though naturally wavering and undecided, he had the skill to give a colouring of moderation and prudence to that conduct which sprang from hesitation ; and, by adopting the reasonings of wiser men, he justified that course which in him was the result of unreasonable doubts. But as he was wanting in discrimination of justice, right, and propriety, it not unfrequently happened that the very art with which he covered the fact that he followed rather than led, turned to his discredit ; and acts by no means honourable to him were very generally ascribed to his own cunning, which

were in truth only attributable to his own weakness. Without giving the whole history of his life, these facts could not have been made manifest by any other means than by description, and therefore I have thought fit to point out some peculiarities in a character which would not probably have room to develop itself.

He loved, I have said, that old hall, and would pass many an hour there, either walking to and fro—apparently in deep thought, but in reality more engaged in day-dreams than meditations—or in writing or reading at a table in one of the windows, while ever and anon he raised his eyes to the banners and ensigns which hung from the beams, and contemplated with pleasure the long ancestral line of which they were mementoes.

In this hall he was found by his fair ward, Rose d'Albret, and her two companions, on their return from the battlements; but the Lady had to place her hand upon his arm before he roused himself from a book which he seemed studying deeply.

"De Montigni has just arrived, my dear uncle," said Rose, as he looked up; "we saw him from the walls."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the Count; "I knew no harm would happen to him. Ah, here he comes!"

As he spoke, the young nobleman entered the hall, followed by the good farmer Chasseron; and Monsieur de Liancourt advancing towards him, opened his arms and embraced him with every mark of kindness.

"Welcome! welcome, my dear boy!" he said, in a somewhat pompous tone; "welcome back to Marzay. You will find the old château just as it was, though your uncle cannot boast of bearing his years as well, Louis. Here are your gay cousin Chazeul and my fair ward Rose, all ready to receive you, and wish you joy of your return. Why, you look somewhat thin and pale!"

Chazeul embraced De Montigni also, and congratulated him upon his safe arrival in his native land, adding, "You have been no great traveller, I think, nevertheless, Louis. Padua

has been your boundary, has it not? And there, doubtless, you have made yourself a very learned man, while we here have learned nothing but hard blows and rough campaigns. By my faith, you have, I think, chosen the better part, at least the happier one, though here is a fair reward for all one's labours. Sweet Rose, do you not welcome your cousin?"

The cheek of Rose d'Albret grew somewhat red, partly through indignation, partly through embarrassment. She saw clearly enough the latent design of the Marquis de Chazeul in speaking of her as if she were actually his; and she felt some anger at being called forward to welcome the companion of her youth, as if she were not prompt to do so, by a man who had shown such indifference to his safety. She came forward gracefully, however, and held out her hand to De Montigni, with a warm and kindly smile, saying, "Indeed I am very glad to see you, Louis; but you would take no notice of me just now. I waved my hand to you from the walls, to be the first to wish you joy on your return, but you did not look up."

De Montigni coloured, and faltered for a moment, but then replied earnestly, "I saw you from a distance, and knew you at once; but as I came near, a thousand memories of other days assailed me, Mademoiselle d'Albret. Days long gone rose up before me, hopes vanished, pleasures past away, regrets unavailing; and I could not but give myself up to thought."

Rose asked herself what were the hopes, what the regrets, he spoke of; and her heart beat, and her cheek grew somewhat pale. She looked round, however; Chazeul was talking in a whisper with her guardian; the priest was standing in the window; and she said, in a low voice, "Do not call me Mademoiselle d'Albret, Louis. That is a cold name. It used ever to be Rose, or Cousin, in former days."

"Cousin you are not, except by courtesy," replied De Montigni, in the same tone, "and I did not venture to call you Rose, now that you are another's."

The colour came warmly into her cheek, but she cast down her eyes, saying, in a tone scarcely audible, "I am not another's yet; and,

if ever I am, I shall then be your Cousin really."

De Montigni knew little of the world, it is true; but yet when a woman speaks of such matters, in so low a tone, to one for whom she professes friendship, it shows at least a confidence in him, which is near akin to deeper regard. He was embarrassed, however; and how many opportunities does not embarrassment cause us to lose for ever! how often does it make us seem the very reverse of what we are! The kind appear harsh, the affectionate cold, the modest even impudent. He knew not what to reply; and suddenly breaking off their private conversation, though it might have lasted longer, for his uncle was still talking eagerly with Chazeul, he turned to his companion Chasseron, who, standing a step behind, had remained unnoticed, watching with his clear and penetrating eyes all that was passing before him, and drawing at once his own conclusions.

"My dear uncle," said the young nobleman, addressing Monsieur de Liancourt, "here is a

worthy gentleman to whom I have promised a welcome for the night in your name. I found him in the wood about half an hour ago, attacked by some six or seven marauders, two of whom he had disabled before I came up."

"Ay, sir," rejoined Chasseron, "and if you had not come up and fought gallantly when you did come, the rest would have soon disabled me. To your courage and skill I owe my life, *pardie!*"

"Indeed!" cried Rose d'Albret, with her cheek glowing and her eyes turned somewhat reproachfully towards Chazeul, "I told you I was sure Louis was attacked, and that the guns we heard were those of some of these plunderers. I knew De Montigni was coming at that hour," she added as a sort of explanation, "and thought it very likely that he would meet with some lawless band in the wood."

"It was in my defence, fair Lady, that he fought," said Chasseron, "and gallantly he did fight, too."

"And pray, sir, who are you?" demanded Chazeul, with an angry spot upon his cheek at

hearing the praises of one whom he wished to believe weak and timid.

"A very poor gentleman, sir," replied Chasseron, "not many poorer in the realm of France; and yet a gentleman. My name is Michael de Chasseron; and in days of yore, I have seen many a well stricken field; so that I am some judge of such matters, though now I have laid aside that trade, and am, as you may see, but a cultivator of the ground."

"Michael de Chasseron! I have heard the name," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "at all events you are welcome, sir; and such entertainment as the Château of Marzay can afford you shall command."

Chasseron was expressing his thanks briefly, when a loud rough-toned but hearty voice was heard without, exclaiming "Where is he? where is he? where is my dear boy?" and at the same moment an old man entered the room, who had apparently, though not really, numbered more years than Monsieur de Liancourt himself. He was dressed in a buff coat of buckskin, laced with gold, with a high-standing

collar, according to a fashion passed away some fifteen or twenty years before, with no ruff round his neck, but merely a plain linen cape turned back from his grey beard and neck. Over his shoulders hung a riband, from which was suspended the cross of a Commander of the order of St. John, and in his hand he carried a stout staff, on which he leant as he advanced up the hall, somewhat limping in his gait from an old wound in the leg. A deep scar appeared on his brow, and a large hole on his right cheek, mementoes of former fields; and his whole frame seemed greatly shattered by injuries and labours. His eye however was clear and bright, his cheek warm and healthy, and his countenance frank and smiling.

The instant he entered he paused, looked straight towards De Montigni, and then stretched out his arms. The young man sprang to meet his embrace, and the old commander held him for several moments to his heart, unable apparently to speak from emotion. A tear rose in the eye of Rose d'Albret as she witnessed

the meeting, and for a moment she turned away towards the window.

"Welcome, welcome, Louis," cried the old Commander de Liancourt, "welcome back at length, my boy; but what the devil made thee stay away so long? thou shouldst have been here years ago! 'Tis a bad business, Louis, 'tis a bad business; but no matter for that, it can't be helped. We are all fools at some time of our lives; one man when he is young, another man when he is old. Heaven help us, man, how tall thou art grown! and I'll warrant you, notwithstanding all they say of your studies, can wield a sword or couch a lance with any one. *Pardie*, I'll have thee run a tilt with Chazeul in the court-yard to-morrow!" and dropping his voice, he added with a laugh "break his head for him, Louis; he is a coxcomb and a knave, though he be my sister's son; but she's not much better, for that matter."

While he spoke, he held the young man by the hand, and eyed him all over with a look of fond affection, seeming to attend but little to

what he said in reply, though De Montigni answered him in warm terms of regard, and declared he looked in better health than when last he saw him.

"Ay, boy, ay," said the old commander, "rest and idleness have done something for me; though if I could have mounted my horse, I would have been in the field long ago; but this accursed wound still keeps me out of the saddle, and I am no better than an old woman,—food for worms—food for worms, Louis! This old carrion of mine is quite ready for the earth, when it be God's will. But you must see old Estoc; he bore your father's cornet at Jarnac; and the old villain does not know you are come, or he would have been here long ago. Halloo there! Estoc! Estoc!" and he made the hall ring with his shout.

"For heaven's sake, my good brother," said Monsieur de Liancourt, "do not shake the walls of the château down. Some one tell Estoc that Monsieur de Montigni is arrived."

"Monsieur de Montigni!" said the commander, imitating his brother's tone. "Warm

that, Louis!—cordial! Monsieur de Montigni! *Ventre saint gris!* have you quite forgot he is your nephew, brother? Your eldest sister's son? Ah! poor Louise; if she could but see what I see!—Well, 'tis no matter, the grave is a sure shield against many a wound."

"Come, come, now brother," said Monsieur de Liancourt, somewhat sharply, "your humour gets intolerable. Did you not promise that I should have none of this?"

"Promise? No, not a bit of it," cried the old commander; "I always keep my promises, Anthony; I wish others did as well. However, there is no use of talking now. You must have it all your own way. You always did; and a pretty affair you often made of it. Ah! here comes Estoc.—Here he is, old comrade, here he is, with just the same face he went away, only with a beard on it!"

These words were addressed to a tall, old, weather-beaten man, as thin and as stiff as a lance, who advanced with great strides up the hall, and taking the Baron de Montigni in his arms, gave him a great hug; then suddenly letting

him go, he said "I could not help it, sir, indeed. Bless my heart, it seems as if you were little Louis still; do you recollect how I used to teach you to ride, and to shoot, and to play with sword and buckler?"

"Ay, that I do, Estoc," replied the young nobleman; "those lessons have served me well, many a time since, and no longer ago than to-day. But I must give my companion of this afternoon's adventure into your charge, Estoc. Where is Monsieur de Chasseron?" he continued, looking around.

"He left the room this moment, probably to see after his horse," observed father Walter, advancing from the window for the first time.

"I will go and find him," answered Estoc; "I passed some one in the vestibule, but as it is growing grey, I scarcely saw him;" and he turned abruptly to depart.

"Hark ye, Estoc," said the old commander, detaining him for a moment, and speaking in a whisper, "come up to his room when he goes to change his clothes. I must have some talk

with him; the boy must know how he stands here—do you understand?”

Estoc nodded his head, and took his departure without reply.

In the meantime the priest had held out his hand to the young Baron de Montigni, saying, “Though the last to wish you joy on your return, sir, I do so sincerely, and trust you have fared well during your absence.”

“Ah! good father,” exclaimed the young Baron, “in this dim light I did not know you; but I am right glad to see you again, and have to thank you for many a wise counsel and much good instruction, by which I hope I have not failed to profit. Have you been well since last we parted?”

“As well as I could wish to be,” replied the priest; “not that I am sure that high health is as great a blessing as men think. Like wealth and many another of this world’s gifts, it sometimes leads us to forget our dependence on the Giver.”

“I trust not to a well-regulated mind,” said

De Montigni; "and I am sure, to you it could be no source of evil."

The old man looked down and shut his teeth fast together; and Monsieur de Liancourt, wishing to bring a scene which was not altogether pleasing to him to a close as speedily as possible, told De Montigni that the evening meal would be ready in half an hour, so that he had but time to change his riding-dress.

The young nobleman lingered for a few moments, however, conversing with those around, and marking many things which the actors therein little knew that he observed. Chazeul had kept close to the side of Rose d'Albret since his conversation with the Count had come to an end, and thrice he had endeavoured to engage her attention to himself, but in vain. At this moment, however, he said with some degree of irritation in his tone, "You seem very much occupied, sweet Rose."

"So I am, Monsieur de Chazeul," she answered aloud, "and interested too.—Are you not so?"

"Oh, certainly," he replied, "these receptions are always interesting ceremonies."

"Not to those, with whom they are ceremonies," said Rose d'Albret; and while Chazeul bit his lip, and his brow contracted moodily, she turned to speak with father Walter de la Tremblade.

De Montigni was conversing, in the meantime, with his two uncles; but he had heard all, and marked particularly the words "Monsieur de Chazeul;" and whatever other effect might be produced upon him, the immediate result was to throw him into a fit of thought, and make him answer some of Monsieur de Liancourts questions at random.

"What are you thinking about, Louis?" cried the old commander; "my brother asks when you left Padua; and you say, five years."

"He is tired and exhausted," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "he had better go and take off these heavy boots, cool his head and hands in some fresh water, and come down to supper, where we will refresh him with a good cup of wine."

"I am tired," said the young nobleman, "for I have ridden more than twenty leagues to-day,

so that I will take your advice, my good uncle, and find my way down to the supper-hall when I hear the trumpet."

Thus saying, he retired, passing through the vestibule, where in one of the deep windows he saw his old friend Estoc, still busily talking to the good farmer Chasseron. De Montigni did not stop, however, but merely said, as he passed by, "Take care of him, Estoc, and seek him out a comfortable room."

"That I will, sir," replied Estoc, and continued his conversation.

The first meeting between the two who now stood together in the window, had been somewhat curious. On quitting the hall, the old soldier had entered the vestibule with his usual wide and hasty strides; and, as that side of the château was turned from the sun, so that it was darker than most other parts of the house, he might not have seen the man he came in search of, who was seated on a bench near the window, had not his attention been called by a voice pronouncing the word, 'Estoc.'

Turning quickly round he advanced towards

him, and gazed in his face, saying, "You seem to know me, sir, and methinks I have seen you before."

"You have, my good friend," replied Chasseron; "we have met twice; do you not remember Michael Chasseron?"

"I remember Peter Chasseron, right well," replied the old soldier; "he took me prisoner at St. Jean, and treated me right kindly; but you are not the same," and while he spoke he continued to examine the countenance of his companion with great attention.

"And when he had taken you," replied the farmer, "he brought you to the person who was in command of the troop. That was his brother. I am the same. Do you recollect me now?"

Estoc gazed at him again, and then answered in a significant tone, "I think I do; but it is twelve years ago, and you were a young man then. Come into the window and let me look at you."

"I am the same I tell you," replied Chasseron, moving into the window; "there, take as good a look as you like."

Estoc did not fail to do so; then cast down his eyes, and bit the side of his hand with his teeth. "Well," he said, at length; "you are a bold man to venture here, all things considered. Do you not know that we are all Catholics in this place, and Monsieur de Chazeul one of the foremost of the League, who would think no more of putting you to death, be the result what it would, than of sitting down to his supper?"

"Parbleu! I know it right well," replied Chasseron; "and that is the reason I waited for you here. I am sure that you are not one who would betray me, and as for your leader, the good commander, I would put my life in his hands without the slightest fear."

"That you might, that you might," said the old soldier; "and it will be better to tell him too. But do none of these people know you? Some of them must have seen you. Why, the very name of Chasseron, if they had recollected, was enough to make the Marquis cut your throat. He would no more hesitate to roast a

Huguenot alive in that court-yard, than to kill a stag or a wolf;" and, as he spoke, he looked over his shoulder to see that no one was coming.

"He would need two or three to help him," replied Chasseron; "and I felt sure that, if I trusted to the young Baron's word, I should find those within who would take the part of honour. But none of these men have seen me for years; and when they did, 'twas but for a moment. You know in those days I came and went like the lightning. As for the name of Chasseron, it has long been forgotten too.—But hark ye, Estoc, you love this young Lord it seems? Now it is for his sake that I have come hither; not for a night's lodging, which I could obtain where I chose. I have heard at Cœuvres that they are playing him false here; and that there are plans afoot for doing him wrong in several ways. Perhaps I may aid him, if I know the facts; and I would fain do so for his good father's memory. He was as high and honourable a gentleman as any in France. Though adversaries, we were not enemies, and I owed him something too for

courtesies shown when, God help me, there were few to show them."

"Ah! I wish my poor Lord could hear those words," cried Estoc. "But you are right, sir, you are right. They are playing poor Louis false. Wait a bit, and you shall hear more in the course of the evening; and if you can help him, though I doubt it, God will bless you, were you twenty times a heretic."

"Parbleu! you must be speedy with your tidings, Master Estoc," said Chasseron, "for I must be away before nine to-morrow. I have got my wheat to dispose of," he added; "a weighty matter in my new trade."

The old soldier laughed. "I should think, sir, you would make but a poor farmer," he replied; "but you shall have all my news this very night. Ha! here comes the young Lord. As soon as he is gone by, I will tell the good old commander that you are in the house; and you shall see him yourself in his room."

Before Chasseron could reply, De Montigni passed through the vestibule, as I have before

described; but the moment he was gone the old soldier added, "We are to talk with the poor lad while he is dressing, and if I can so manage it, you shall be called to take a part; if not, I will find the means ere night be over. Here come the rest—let them pass, and then wait for me. I will be back with you in a minute."

As he spoke, all those whom we have seen conversing in the hall passed through the vestibule, with the exception of Rose d'Albret, who retired by another door, leading direct to her own apartment. The good old commander, supporting himself on his stick, was the last that appeared, with his eyes bent down upon the ground, and his lips muttering disconnected sentences to himself. In the semi-darkness that now reigned, no one took any notice of Chasseron or his companion; but the moment that his old leader had reached the opposite door, Estoc followed, and taking his hand familiarly, put it through his own arm, as if to assist him on his way; but at the same time he bent his head and seemed to whisper. The old

commander suddenly stopped gazing in his face, and then hurried on at a quicker pace than before, in evident agitation.

In less than two minutes, Estoc returned, saying in a low voice, "Come, sir, come! he is wild to see you;" and, with a quick step, Chasseron followed him from the room.

CHAPTER V.

LOUIS DE MONTIGNI was in hope of a brief period of repose and solitude; repose not so much of the body as of the mind; solitude in which he might, to use the fine expression of Holy Writ, "Commune with his own heart and be still." He had much need of it; for the last half hour had exhausted him more than all the fatigues of the day. It had been one of greater emotion than he knew, or would admit; and what is there more wearing than emotion? He imagined that he felt pained and grieved, only at finding, on his coming back to a place which had long been his home, that he was half a stranger, his place in its familiarity usurped by another, and he himself looked upon, not as the returned son of the house, but as one to be observed and

marked by those now in possession. But in reality and truth, there were deeper sources of anxiety and sorrow below; though it must always be full of anguish to a young and inexperienced heart to find for the first time the emptiness of professions, the hollowness of half the friendships to which we trusted, the selfishness of the many, the baseness of some, the instability of others, the falsehood, even, of the near and dear—to discover that a few short years, a few short hours, perhaps, will shake us loose from hearts in which we fancied ourselves rooted so that tempests would not tear us out. Yet there are more painful things than even these every-day lessons of the world's constitution; things that, blighting at once hope and confidence, extinguishing the lamp of the future, and clouding the moonlight of memory, dispose us to lay down the weary head upon any pillow for repose—even if it be that of the grave.

He would not show all that he felt; he wished to show no part of it; and he was anxious, most anxious, to have a short space,

in which, by his own power over his own mind, he might repress all external appearances of disappointment and regret, and so school his heart, that not the slightest token of what was passing therein might show itself in his outward demeanour.

With this purpose, and in this hope, he took his way up one of the narrow wooden staircases in the château, towards the apartments which had been formerly apportioned to him, and which he had been informed were again prepared for his reception. He entered the well remembered anteroom, and looked round. Everything was just as he left it; the very chairs and tables were the same, and seemed in the same position. He wished that it had been otherwise; he would have been glad to see gilding and tinsel, and new decorations, rather than the well-remembered old oak panelling, the huge chimney, with the iron dogs to support the wood, and the tall-backed, uncomfortable chairs. It made him feel that man alone was changed. It was full of memories which he wished not to indulge. He went on quickly into the room beyond,

taking up the lamp which stood upon the table in the antechamber; but there it was just the same. His servants, thinking he would stay longer in the hall, had spread out some of his apparel in haste, and had gone to greet their fellows in the offices; but even the sight of the various things he had brought with him from a foreign land were painful to him. They brought the thought of peaceful days, brightened by occasional dreams of happiness to come, of expectations which in truth he had been in no haste to realize till it was too late, of vague aspirations, which, like some shrubs that produce a long succession of ephemeral blossoms, had died as they bloomed, but flowered again every day.

Casting himself into a seat, he leaned his head upon his hand, and for a minute or two gave himself up to thought. "'Tis strange," he said to himself; "I knew not how deeply I should feel this, till I came near these gates. The apprehension was less than the reality. Scarcely an hour ago, I could have talked calmly of all; could have jested on it, as

any indifferent thing. But to feel it, is very, very different." He mused for a moment, then raised his eyes and gazed about the room. Some one had placed an ebony crucifix upon a small table at the side, with the figure of the dying Saviour in ivory standing boldly out from the black background of the cross. It was the only change that had taken place, and yet it struck him with melancholy, rather than consolatory feelings.

"I must conquer this," he thought. "What right have I to repine at another's happiness?" But ere he could give further way to his reflections, he heard a step in the anteroom; and rising, he cast off his cloak, and unlooped his collar, as if engaged in preparing for the evening meal.

The moment after his uncle, the Count de Liancourt, entered with an air of assumed cheerfulness, which Montigni saw at a glance, only covered some anxiety.

"Well, Louis," he said, "all, you see, is just as you left it."

"All in these rooms appears to be so, sir,"

he replied; and then feeling that there was more point in the words than he wished to give them, he added, "But a good many changes seem to have been made in the rest of the house."

"Few, very few," answered Monsieur de Liancourt; "and most of those I had long intended. The others are but preparations for the wedding."

His nephew was silent, and the Count paused for want of that assistance which a single word might have given. At that moment one of the young nobleman's servants appeared, and began to arrange his apparel; but the Count, resolved to pursue the purpose for which he had come, gave an impatient "Pshaw!" and then added, "Send him away, Louis; he can come again in a quarter of an hour."

The man withdrew at a sign; and De Montigni, turning to his uncle with a grave and self-possessed tone, which somewhat surprised and embarrassed one who had been always accustomed to think of him as a boy, inquired,

"Have you anything of importance to say, sir?" adding, "if you have, I could wish you would reserve it till to-morrow; when less fatigued I shall be able to hear it with better attention and a clearer mind."

"Oh, no! nothing — nothing particular, Louis," said his uncle, who had seated himself; "only we were speaking of Chazeul's marriage. I trust you think it is a good arrangement?"

"To anything that may promote Mademoiselle's d'Albret's happiness, I cannot of course object," replied De Montigni gravely, and there he stopped.

Another embarrassing pause succeeded, and then the Count went on, saying, "It is a matter I have long determined on. The union of the houses of Chazeul and De Marennes must at once strike every one as an alliance much to be desired. The important family thus raised up must, in the present troubled state of the country, gain great influence, and may be of great service to the state; and as to private and family considerations, they all tend strongly to

the same point ; and therefore, after mature consideration, I resolved that it should take place."

De Montigni made no answer ; and before his uncle, who was not at all well pleased with his silence, could find words to go on, a heavy step was heard in the anteroom, and the good old commander opened the door. The old man's eyes were somewhat red, as if they had had recent tears in them ; but when he saw his brother, a look of surprise and disappointment came into his countenance, and he drew back a step, saying, " I did not know you were here, Anthony. I will not disturb you."

" Oh no, my dear uncle ! " cried De Montigni ; " Monsieur de Liancourt says he has nothing important to say. Pray come in. You must not take the trouble of coming up that long stair for nothing."

" No, no, Louis," replied the commander, " some other time—to-morrow, or the next day we will have our chat. Anthony's nothings are often the most important things he has to do ; " and thus saying, he retired and closed the door.

"How peevish he grows!" said the Count. "However, Louis, I am glad to find you approve of your cousin's marriage with my fair ward; and—"

"Nay, sir," interrupted De Montigni, "I neither approve nor disapprove of a matter in which I have no say, and have never been consulted. Whatever Mademoiselle d'Albret thinks best for her happiness, must have my best wishes for its result."

"Well, well, that is the same thing," cried his uncle, somewhat sharply; "of course she thinks it will be for her happiness; and I am sure of it, which is of more importance. Rose is a very good, amiable girl, and will always be able to find happiness in the line of duty; and I am not one to deceive myself as to what is best for those committed to my care. It has been my anxious contemplation for many a year, how to promote the interests and comfort of the three persons who seem especially placed under my guidance and direction, Rose, yourself, and Chazeul. He being of an eager, active, and worldly disposition, is best fitted for

struggling with these hard and contentious times, and therefore in the distribution of the property of my family, which is large enough to satisfy all, I intend to assign him all the territorial possessions at my death. On you who are of a studious, calm, and thoughtful character, I intend to bestow at once all the rich benefices which are held by the house of Liancourt. They are equal in revenues to the land, and, with your own hereditary property, will form a princely income. Then the bishopric of Sens must necessarily soon fall in, for my uncle who holds it is in his eightieth year. To it, will be easily attached the hat of a cardinal, as has indeed been generally done ; and thus one of the highest dignities in the world will be secured to you."

He spoke volubly and eagerly, to get over as fast as possible the announcement of the dispositions he thought fit to make, without interruption ; and he then added with an air of dignified satisfaction, " Thus you see, my dear Louis, I have in every respect considered your happiness and your fortune, and nothing remains but to

sign the papers which confirm this arrangement."

But though the Count thought himself both just and generous, and felt himself taking an elevated position towards his nephew, Louis de Montigni saw the matter in a somewhat different light. "Rose d'Albret," he thought, "the whole inheritance of Marennnes, all the estates of Liancourt added to those of Chazeul ! This is certainly the lion's portion, yet would I give up every part therein right willingly but one."

He remained silent, however, with his head leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the table, till his uncle exclaimed impatiently, "You make no answer, Louis. Is it possible that you are dissatisfied—ungrateful?"

"No, my dear uncle !" replied the young nobleman. "But this is a very important question ; and I told you that I would fain have some repose before I discussed such things ! I repeat it, that I could much wish to have some time for consideration and thought, before I make any answer, farther than that I thank

you deeply for all the care and kindness which you have always bestowed upon me."

"Methinks," said his uncle in a tone of displeasure, "that one moment's reflection were enough to show you the propriety of that which is proposed, and to induce you to sign at once the papers necessary to confirm such a well-considered arrangement."

"Nay, sir," answered De Montigni, "it might be so, if only the disposition of your property were concerned."

"And pray what is there more?" asked the Count angrily; "what have I pretended to dispose of, in which I have no right to dictate? I suppose you will not deny, that I am authorized to bestow the hand of my ward where I think proper? What is there else that I dispose of, that is not my own?"

"Of me, my dear uncle," replied De Montigni. "If I understand you right, I must enter the church. Though some men hold bishoprics without such a process, according to the evil practices of these corrupt days, such cannot be the case long: nor were I one to follow such an

iniquitous course. All these benefices by right ought to be held by an ecclesiastic; and I will never hold them but as one. Indeed, what you have said of my studious and thoughtful habits, shows that you know such must be the case. The church, therefore, is to be my destiny under this plan; but surely such a step requires somewhat more than *a moment's consideration*. It is a question I have never contemplated: it never entered my thoughts. I came hither prepared to throw off my somewhat long-indulged inactivity, to take a part in what is passing in my native land, after due deliberation and inquiry to draw the sword rather than to put on the gown. Nay, more, I should have done so long ago, had you yourself not urged me strongly, in every letter but your last, to remain at Padua and continue my studies, without entering into a strife where family is ranged against family, and brother takes arms against brother."

"And why did I do so?" asked Monsieur Liancourt. "Simply because I have long determined on what I have this night announced.

Is the rich bishopric, so long in my family, to be lost—to be thrown away for a whim? No, no, Louis. It was that you might be qualified to hold it, and disposed by habit to receive it, that made me wish you to stay where you were.”

“If you had announced your wishes, sir, before, I should have been better prepared to fulfil them,” replied his nephew; “as it is I must have time. There may be men who look upon these things lightly, who could take upon them the solemn vows which bind them to the highest and holiest duties, without care or consideration. They may be right, or they may be wrong; they may be men who, from the course of their life and the habits of their thought, are fully prepared for such a decision, though conscious of its great importance: or they may be those who, never intending to fulfil the obligations of any station in which they are placed, look upon all indifferently. I am in neither of these conditions; I have never considered the subject; I have prepared my mind for other things; but if I do consent, it will be with the

determination to act up to the calling I assume, and be an ecclesiastic in spirit and in heart, as well as in name."

"Oh, if it be only conscientious considerations that withhold you," said his uncle, "those will be soon satisfied by good father Walter. He shall speak with you this very night. You know him, and esteem him."

"Much," replied Montigni, "and will gladly converse with him for an hour or two alone on this subject."

"Why not at once," asked his uncle; "I can call him in a minute, his chamber is but at the end of the passage."

As he spoke, however, the sound of a trumpet, as was then common in France, announced the hour of supper; and feeling that he could not press the subject further, Monsieur de Liancourt added, "Well, well, afterwards will do; and I doubt not that to-morrow I shall find you quite determined, and willing to sign the papers, and accept the benefices, which shall be made over to you immediately."

"What are these papers, sir," asked De

Montigni, without giving any reply upon the subject of his willingness.

"Oh, nothing but common forms," replied his uncle, "I cannot explain them all to you just now, for supper is served. Come, De Montigni."

"I am not quite ready yet," answered the young baron, "pray do not wait for me; I will join you in a few minutes."

His uncle accordingly left him; but instead of proceeding to change his dress, De Montigni covered his eyes with his hands, and gave himself up for a few minutes to bitter and anxious thought. Oh how many wild and tumultuous feelings passed through his bosom during that short space of time! and all were sad and painful. The contemplation of the future, the memory of the past, the consideration of the present, regret, apprehension, indecision, were all present to his mind at once; and, for some time, thought seemed one strange chaos of indistinct and gloomy forms, from which at length rose up one image more painful than all the rest. His mind rested upon Rose d'Albret, and upon the

idea of losing her for ever. Remembrance brought her back as the companion of his boyhood; he recollected how she had shared his sports, how she had ridden by his side through the scenes around, how she had taken part in his pleasures and his fancies, how she had soothed him under any of the petty griefs of youth, how she had turned from him anger and reproof, when in the gay light-heartedness of early years he had offended the irritable gravity of age. She had always loved him he thought, and he had always loved her, with the tender and unselfish love of years when passion is unknown. He had ever thought her beautiful,—most beautiful; but it was the kindness, the affection, in her radiant eyes that gave them double light to him; and now he had seen her in the full loveliness of womanly perfection, he had beheld the same looks bent upon him from a face which might well inspire more ardent feelings; and yet he was even now to see her given to another,—now, at the very moment when he had most learnt to long for her himself. Often he had fancied in his boyish dreams that, at

some future period she would be his own; that their mutual lives, through maturity and age, would pass in the same happy confidence, in the same warm affection, which had brightened their childhood. He almost believed that some one had told him so, that she had been originally destined for him; and, as his mind rested upon that thought, his disappointment became the more bitter.

What was to be his future life then? to be cut off from all the joys of domestic life; to embrace that cold and stern profession which, in his church, excluded those who adopted it from all the warm relations of husband and father; to pass his days in the dull routine of formal services, or in the petty intrigues and artful manœuvres which have too often disgraced the Roman hierarchy; to cast from him at once all the dreams and aspirations of young and energetic manhood; and, before his hair was grey, to clothe his mind with the chilly garmenture of age. He shrunk from the thought; but, when he recollected that Rose d'Albret was to be the wife of another, it seemed to him a

matter of small moment how his after days were to be passed.

Such were some of his thoughts, and only some; for there were many, many more; and yet they occupied but a very few minutes. It was not one by one they came, but appeared before him like a hostile army, stretching out at once on every side wherever his eye was turned. Nevertheless he could have gone on for hours, and yet not have exhausted all the bitter subjects of contemplation presented to him.

Most likely, indeed, he would have gone on much longer, had not one of his servants presented himself to assist him in dressing; and starting up from his sorrowful reveries, he hastened to cast off his travel-stained garments, and in a few minutes descended to the hall, where the rest of the party were assembled to supper.

A place was reserved for him between the count and the old commander. On the right hand of the latter sat father Walter, and on the opposite side were Chazeul and Mademoiselle d'Albret. Two or three of the retainers of the house, who bore the rank of gentlemen, filled up

the rest of the table, with Chasseron and Estoc at the bottom. It was on the countenance of Rose d'Albret, however, that the eyes of De Montigni rested, as with a slow step he entered the hall. She was looking thoughtfully down, with a pale cheek and a grave brow ; and she did not look up till he had taken his seat, when she did so with a start, as if suddenly wakened from her reverie.

Monsieur de Liancourt made an effort to receive him with a cheerful and unembarrassed air, laughed and talked more than was necessary, but yet was evidently occupied with other thoughts, and not altogether well pleased. Chazeul tried hard to engage his fair companion in a low-toned conversation, but, failing there, turned to his cousin De Montigni, and by the sort of bantering persiflage which has been common in all ages to small wits, sought to show his own superiority as a man of the world, at the expense of his relation's inexperience. But the extent of De Montigni's information, his knowledge of other scenes and other lands, the higher tone of his

mind, and, above all, that calmness which is often generated by deep and powerful feelings, even when they are those of sadness and disappointment, set the haughty and supercilious jests of the Leaguer at nought; and he often rebuked him with a quick and cutting reply, which made the old commander laugh, and once called a smile even upon the grave lips of father Walter.

Rose seemed greatly busied with her own thoughts, and attended little to what was passing, though once indeed she raised her eyes to Montigni's face with a slight smile, while he administered some wholesome chastisement to the jeering spirit of his cousin; and when he went on in a few brief sentences to point out that there were higher things in life, than those on which Chazeul seemed to set such store, her eyes brightened, her look became full of interest and pleasure; and then she suddenly withdrew her gaze from his face, and fell into deeper thought than before.

There were one or two persons present who marked all this, and knew that the two cousins

were rivals in heart, though not openly; and they easily judged, that the contrast was unfavourable to him who seemed the successful lover. Amongst these, there were some who wished to prolong it; but the priest took the first opportunity of stopping any further comparison, by giving thanks after meat, as soon as possible, and rising to depart.

In the little confusion which always takes place at the conclusion of a meal, the old commander drew De Montigni aside and whispered, "I will come up and see you directly, Louis, if you will go up to your own room."

"The Count is going to send Monsieur de la Tremblade to me," replied the young nobleman, in the same tone; "will he interrupt you?"

"Yes, yes, diabolically," replied the old soldier; "get rid of him as soon as you can, Louis. I will set a watch, to see when he leaves you, and come immediately after, for I must and will speak with you to-night, let who will try to prevent it. Mind, be upon your guard with him," he added, "promise nothing, engage your-

self to nothing. Have I your word, that you will not, till you have spoken with me?"

"You have, my dear uncle," replied Montigni; and at the same moment the priest approached, and laying his hand upon the young Baron's arm, he said "Monsieur de Liancourt tells me, you desire to speak with me."

"He wished me to have some conversation with you, my good Father," replied De Montigni, "and I shall be most happy when you are at leisure."

"This moment, if you please," rejoined the priest; and they left the hall together, the young nobleman perceiving as he did so, that the eyes of Rose d'Albret were fixed upon him, with an eager and somewhat anxious gaze.

CHAPTER VI.

Nothing was said, either by De Montigni or father Walter till they reached the chamber of the former, where, closing the door, the young nobleman placed a seat for his reverend companion, and asked him if Monsieur de Liancourt had held any communication with him upon the subject on which they were about to speak?

"A few words were all that passed," replied father Walter, in a mild, though grave tone; "but they were sufficient to show me that the matter on which you wish to consult me is one in regard to which your uncle and myself have often conferred before."

"Nay," replied De Montigni; "the Count has not put the business on its right footing: let us settle that first, my good father. I did not de-

sire to consult you, but he declared that you would easily remove from my mind the strong objections which I entertain to pledging myself for any consideration to enter the church without much deliberation, and a considerable time for thought. I expressed myself most willing to hear all you could say upon the subject, though I much doubted, from a knowledge of my own character, that you would succeed in removing my scruples, and, from a knowledge of yours, that you would even make the attempt."

"You were perfectly right, my son," replied the priest, after a moment's pause; "my arguments could but tend to show that the profession which your uncle wishes you to embrace is the highest, as it is the holiest, to which man can dedicate himself; but I fear much, that very consideration would tend rather to induce you to pause long, and to think well before you took upon yourself such high duties and responsibilities, than to hurry you on, as is the case with so many, into a rash, I might almost call it an impious, intrusion into a sacred calling, which

should be approached with reverence, and not without the full concurrence of the heart."

De Montigni smiled, well pleased. Various circumstances, all apparently small, but weighty in their sum, had induced him to imagine that father Walter de la Tremblade was one of those who had consulted together to frustrate his hopes, and disappoint his wishes; but the calm and reasonable answer which he now made removed the suspicion. Whether he deceived himself or not may be seen hereafter.

"I am happy to find, my dear father," he said, "that your good and disinterested opinion confirms my own, as it will give me strength and confidence in my determination."

"Of all the many wise maxims which have come down to us, confirmed by the experience of ages," replied the priest, "one of the surest is, 'Do nothing rashly;' and if applicable to the common affairs of life, it is still more so to points where the whole of our future existence, here and hereafter, is affected. You are right, my son, to pause and deliberate; but before I give any advice beyond the general opinion which

I have expressed, let me hear all the circumstances, the doubts, and considerations that affect you; and you shall then have my best counsel, which may, perhaps, be valuable, as that of a man long accustomed to consider and, with God's aid, to decide upon questions, in which the consciences of those very dear to him, as members of his flock, are concerned. Tell me what are your doubts—what are your difficulties; and if I can I will resolve them."

"My doubts, good father," replied Louis de Montigni, "are simply whether I am fitted, either by inclination or by character, for the profession my uncle would put upon me. No mention was ever made of such a plan till this very night; and now, fatigued in body and somewhat agitated in mind, I am asked to decide at once, upon a question of such vital importance to myself."

"That is wrong—that is all very wrong," answered the priest. "You must have time—it is absolutely necessary. Yet," he continued, after a moment's pause, "I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake. I am

sure Monsieur de Liancourt did not intend to urge such a speedy decision upon that point. Perhaps it was your acquiescence alone in the disposal of his property that he required. You are well aware that the benefices may be held by one who is not in the church; and his conferring them on you, while he is himself living will prevent any cavil which might be raised in the distracted state of the country, with regard to your obtaining them, if they were merely destined for you at his death. I do not mean," he added in a grave tone, "to pronounce any opinion upon the propriety of laymen holding such property. That is not a question for me to decide."

"But it is one for me to consider in accepting them," said De Montigni; "and I scruple not to acknowledge, that I hold the corrupt practice in horror and reprobation."

"I must not deny that I think you are right," replied father Walter; "but yet your refusal to accept this portion of his property, would greatly embarrass and grieve your uncle. All the arrangements being concluded for Mon-

sieur de Chazeul's marriage with Mademoiselle d'Albret, your rejection of the share assigned to you, would prove a serious inconvenience to all parties; and I am sure you would not wish to throw any impediment in the way of her happiness, or your cousin's either."

"And does her happiness so entirely depend upon this marriage?" asked the young nobleman bitterly.

"Undoubtedly!" replied the priest, with an air of surprise at the very question.

"Then my course will be easy!" exclaimed De Montigni. "I will never do ought to give her one uneasy moment."

"That is noble, and generous, and like yourself!" said Walter de la Tremblade, holding out his hand to him. "I was quite sure that you would never hesitate at any personal sacrifice for the happiness of those you love. What course, then, do you intend to pursue?"

De Montigni, however, remembered the promise he had made to his uncle, and he replied, "Of that I must think; all I can say at present is, that no wish of Rose d'Albret's shall ever

be thwarted by me. First, in order to form a judgment of my future conduct, I would fain know all the circumstances of the case ; and, my good father, as you have thus far dealt frankly with me, I would fain ask you a few questions, hoping for clear information."

"I will give you the best that I possess, my son," replied the priest. "But you must recollect that I am not a man of the world, and meddle little with things that are not brought absolutely under my notice."

"Well, then, to begin with matters that you do understand," said De Montigni; "if I accept these benefices, and sign the papers my uncle wishes me to sign, do I in any degree bind myself either to enter the church, or to hold preferment which I think should be reserved for ecclesiastics?"

"Not in the least, my son," answered father Walter, "nothing can bind you to the church but vows made to the church; and as to the benefices you can give them all away next day; at no greater risk than being called by some, an enthusiastic fool."

"That is soon met," said the young nobleman; "but if this be so, what is the need of my signing any papers at all?"

The priest paused for a moment in thought; but then answered, looking suddenly up, "It is simply because, as your uncle's nearest relation you have a claim to his property, either the entire estate or a moiety, I know not well which. The benefices he can bestow where he likes, and he gives them to you as an equivalent to the other, thinking that, if the bishopric can be obtained for you, as doubtless it might be if you so liked, the advantages would be at least equal."

"My uncle did not tell me this!" replied De Montigni, with an air of mortification. "My uncle did not tell me this!"

"Perhaps he thought you knew it already," rejoined father Walter; "or, perhaps, he did not remember how generous and self-denying you have always shown yourself."

"He should have dealt openly with me," said the young man in a mournful tone, "He should have dealt openly with me."

He then thought for a few minutes, while the priest watched the varying expressions that came over his countenance with an inquiring and interested eye, reading them as they rose. Perhaps he did not altogether interpret them aright, though the true Roman Catholic priest, who, following the rule of his order, strictly excludes from his breast half the passions that affect other men, learns to trace their workings in others with a skill which those who suffer them cannot acquire. He stands as a spectator of the most critical part in the busy game of life, and sees the cards in either hand, and judges where they are played well or ill.

At length the young nobleman said aloud, "So then I have some real power in this matter; and they would have concealed it from me. A somewhat dangerous course!"

"Perhaps such was not the view, my son," answered father Walter, "the matter could not be concealed from you long, as, if you read the papers, you must have seen what they contained."

"I am not sure of that, good father," re-

joined De Montigni; "they might calculate upon my not reading them at all, or that their contents veiling their meaning in the profuse words of the law, would afford me no clue to my own rights. However, all this must be inquired into. I will now know the truth, wholly and entirely."

"I trust," said the priest gravely, "that you will in no degree forfeit that character of frank and generous disinterestedness which you gained in youth. It is a jewel, my son, inestimable from its rarity. Come, Louis, let me tell your uncle that you will sign the papers."

The young man gazed in his face intently; but father Walter returned the look with calm and unflinching firmness, and then added, "I am no party to any deceit, if any have been committed."

"I believe you, father," replied De Montigni, "for it is you who have unveiled the deceit; but as for the rest, I will make no rash promise. I will know the whole clearly, before I act or promise to act; I will know what are my own rights, and their full extent; I will

know the motives of others, their conduct, and its causes."

The priest smiled, and shook his head; "You lay out labour for many a long day, my son," he said, "if you propose to penetrate into the secrets of any human heart; and in the mean time you stop a union desired by all, to wait upon your caprice. Look into your own bosom, Louis, and inquire there, whether the motives of such a conduct may not have a source in passions you will not like to own; disappointment of some chimerical dreams, jealousy of another's happiness, or revengeful feelings for imaginary injury.

"No, no, no!" replied De Montigni, "my conduct shall be influenced by none of these; and whatever my motives are, they shall be made clear in the eyes of all."

"Well before you act," continued the priest, "ask yourself, if what your uncle proposes is at all unfair. In the division of his property he assigns you more than the simple half, though perhaps not the moiety you might like the best. There is no great injustice in this; there is

nothing to move anger or suspicion; and yet you are evidently somewhat heated, and nourish doubts of those that love you, which you have no just reason to entertain."

"Father, you are mistaken," answered De Montigni, "I am aught but angry; my heart feels too cold and chilled for anything so warm. Suspicion may be there—would it had never entered—but who can help it? When once a concealment or deceit has been practised in matters where all should be fair and open as the day, can confidence be ever restored? no more than you can restore the white bloom to the grape or to the plum which you have once pressed in your hand. I will think of this, good father, I will think of it all well. No man can reproach me for examining closely into that in which I have so great an interest; no man shall have to reproach me for the manner in which I act when I have examined. But let me put a picture before your eyes ere you go, in order that you may see what necessarily presents itself to my eyes. It is of an uncle and two nephews; the one the son of an elder

sister, the other of a younger; the first possessed of moderate estates, but a claim, it seems, to his uncle's property; the other possessed of larger estates already, but, if I judge rightly, without that claim. The one is sent by his uncle and guardian to a foreign country to study: the other remains upon the spot. At the end of five years they meet again, and the uncle proposes a plan which he declares to be equitable. To the son of his eldest sister, who has been absent so long, he offers certain benefices, and proposes that he shall enter the church. To the son of the younger, who has remained upon the spot, he gives the whole of his estates, the hand of his fair ward, and the large property which she inherits. Do not suppose, father, I can shut my eyes to such things; do not suppose that I can do aught but feel them bitterly. Mark me, however, I say not that I will reject this arrangement, even if I have power to do so; I say not that I will throw the least impediment in the way of views and plans which were formed without my concurrence and without my knowledge; but I do

say, that I will consider, and examine, and ponder, before I in any way sanction a proceeding, by which I am destined to be, in every sense, a loser."

"I thought," replied the priest mildly, "that you had already determined not to do anything which could impede the union of Mademoiselle d'Albret with the man of her choice; that you would not frustrate her wishes, or delay her happiness?"

"Nor will I," answered De Montigni; "but I must be well assured in the first place of the conduct which she herself wishes to pursue."

Father Walter shook his head gravely, saying, "My son, my son, I fear you are deceiving yourself. I am not aware whether your knowledge of women be much or little, whether in studious seclusion you have passed your time without mingling with the general world, or whether you have frequented the gay society of Italy, and gained an insight into the female heart as it there appears. But do not deceive yourself into a belief, because Mademoiselle d'Albret sometimes speaks coldly to your cousin, affects an

occasional indifference, ay, or even adds a harsh word towards him—do not believe, I say, that she does not love him. I have always seen that women, circumstanced as she is, from the very modesty of their nature, assume such disguises to conceal the warmer feelings of their heart; and the men with whom they are most free, familiar, ay, and perhaps, affectionate, have the least cause to suppose that they entertain any serious attachment to them,—for where such exists, it always brings diffidence and some reserve along with it.”

De Montigni mused. There was truth, he thought, in what the old man said—it might be, indeed, that he was right. True, in her youth Rose d’Albret was frank, open, and unreserved, her loves and her dislikes were plainly shown. But yet she might be changed. Womanhood and passion might have brought with them reserve, concealment, art. Who could say what in the space of five years might have been effected, and what the girl of fourteen might have become?

“Probably, you are right, good father,” he

replied; "I know but little of woman or woman's arts; but still I am not deceiving myself. All I propose is to pause and consider all things, this as well as any of the rest, in fact, to use your own maxim, and 'do nothing rashly.' As I conclude you will see my uncle to-night, and report to him the result of our conference, pray tell him my resolution, such as it is, and explain to him in terms that will give him no offence, but yet convey my full meaning, that in my determination to consider before I act, I am too firm to be shaken. I find that I have somewhat too long suffered my conduct to be dictated by others, and I do so no more, whatsoever be the result."

"Can you not enable me, Monsieur de Montigni," asked the priest, "to fix some term for your consideration? As your uncle will have to shape his conduct, as he may judge expedient to meet yours, it might be as well to name a time for your decision."

"That I cannot do," replied Montigni; "at least not to-night. At all events it shall not be long before I do decide. Small time will suffice

me, if no means be taken to impede me in judging for myself; if there be, those who employ them must be answerable for the delay. I will now be satisfied on all points—I will see the whole case clearly before I judge. Whenever I do so see it, my course will be determined in an hour. And now, good father," he continued, perceiving that the priest was about to reply, "I would fain discuss this subject with you no more, at least, to-night, though most happy to hear you upon any other, if you have aught else to say."

"Nothing, my son," replied father Walter, rising; "pray remember that the discussion has not been of my seeking. I never thrust myself upon the confidence of any one, happy to give advice or assistance where it is required, but never obtruding it, except at the sacred call of duty; and so, my son, good night and benedicite."

Thus saying, he slowly quitted the room, and walked deliberately down the stairs across a low-roofed hall, where several servants sat, and then mounting another staircase with a quicker

step, found his way to the apartments of the Count de Liancourt. That gentleman, half undressed, was sitting in his dressing-gown conversing with Chazeul, and both eagerly turned to the priest as he entered, demanding, "Well, what does he say? how did you find him disposed?"

Walter de la Tremblade sat down in a vacant chair, and then looking from the one to the other, he said, "I found him firmer, sterner than could be expected from his character or his years. I fear, my son," addressing Monsieur de Liancourt, "that your policy has somewhat run awry. If instead of calling him back you had written to him the plain and straightforward state of the case, telling him that the marriage of Mademoiselle d'Albret with Monsieur de Chazeul here, depended upon the renunciation of his claim to your estates, and begging him to send you his procuration instantly for the purpose of making that renunciation, he would have done so at once."

"Pshaw," cried Chazeul, "you must think him a greater fool than even I do, to suppose

that if he were told those facts he would give up his chance of beauty, grace, and the united estates of Liancourt and Marennes."

"He is no fool," replied the priest, "but one of those with whom it is better to tell the whole truth, and engage his generosity and enthusiasm on your side, than suffer him to discover, not only the facts you would conceal, but that you have endeavoured to conceal them. Better to tell him the truth, Monsieur de Chazeul, than to let him find it out; and allow me to say, he has found out one half already, and will find out the rest ere long."

"*Ventre bleu!* what has he discovered?" demanded Monsieur de Liancourt. "This is an affair indeed."

"He is right well informed," answered the priest, "that the estates of Liancourt are his at your death, in right of his mother."

Chazeul struck his hand vehemently upon the table, exclaiming, "Then the game is up."

"Not exactly," replied the priest; "had he known it a month ago, it would have been much better. Then at a distance, and without the

means of farther inquiry, he would, I am sure, have been easily induced to make the renunciation, in consideration of the benefices, without coming here at all."

"But he has been urging me for these two years," exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt, "to give my consent to his return. I had no power to refuse him, and it was only by persuasions that I kept him there so long."

"Well, but the results, the results, Monsieur de la Tremblade," exclaimed Chazeul: "we will be guided by you. Tell us what conclusions you have come to, and what course it will be best to follow."

"From my conference with him this night," replied the priest, "I see exactly the state of his mind. In the first place I tell you he knows much, and suspects more; he perceives that you have attempted to keep him in the dark; and he is no weak studious boy, such as you believed. He is as firm as a rock, and determined upon his course. You cannot, and will not deceive him on any of the facts of the case; and at present his reply is, that he is determined to take

full time to consider before he decides. There is one way, and only one way to act upon his mind. If you can induce Mademoiselle d'Albret, to ask him to make the renunciation for her sake, he will do it, without the slightest hesitation. Get her but to say three words to that effect, and he will sign the act to-morrow."

"Oh, then the whole matter is easy!" cried Chazeul. "I will induce her to do that in a moment."

The priest looked at him with a somewhat cynical smile, and replied, "You may not find so much facility as you expect, Monsieur. Ladies have caprices; and perhaps you may not be able to make her say the exact words you wish."

"Oh, but I am sure I can!" replied Chazeul. "I know the pretty Rose right well, with all her coquettish ways for goading on a lover's passion, by airs of coldness and indifference; but she is not such a fool as to be blind to the advantages of the most brilliant fortune she can reach in France. With the united es-

tates of Liancourt, Marennes, and Chazeul, we take our seat amongst the highest of the land. Did you not mark what she said to me to-day, about the splendours of a court? Such hopes and expectations, once entering a woman's head, never go out of it, good father."

The priest paused and mused with a slight smile curling his lip; but at length he replied, "Doubtless you are more learned in women's hearts than I am, Monsieur de Chazeul; you have had more to do with them, though in the confessional we sometimes hear strange secrets. However, if you will take my advice, you will not trust to your own unassisted efforts, but send for your mother at once. She is within a two hours' journey, and may easily be here, before noon to-morrow."

"Right, right, father," cried Monsieur de Liancourt, "we will not lose a moment's time. Jacqueline's head is worth all ours put together. It always was so; and poor Louise, when she was alive, was no match for her at all. Let us not lose a moment, but send a messenger to her to-night, so that she may set out the first thing

to-morrow. See to it, Chazeul, see to it; for I am tired, and going to bed. Choose some stout fellow who will do the errand well. Let him avoid the wood, and take the Chartres road; 't is but half a league about."

"I will do it at once," said Chazeul, "for it is now near ten. But still I am sure that I can persuade fair Rose to make the request, before my mother comes; and so, good night, sir."

Thus saying, he left the room, and father Walter only remained, to shake his head with a doubtful air, and say, "He is too confident. God send that he mars not all;" and he, too, left Monsieur de Liancourt to seek repose.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the château of Marzay, on that night, as every day in the wide world in which we live, care and anxiety, hope and expectation, the selfish intrigue, the means of frustrating it, the dark design, the events that are to bring it to light, were all going on side by side at once, separated from each other by thin partitions which served to conceal the proceedings of the various actors from each other, but not from the eye of that overruling Providence who apportions success and disappointment, joy and sorrow, reward and punishment, according to his wise but inscrutable will.

Less than a hundred yards from the chamber of Monsieur de Liancourt, Louis de Montigni sat after the priest left him, with his arms folded on his chest, his head bent down, and his eyes

fixed upon the ground. He thought bitterly over much that had passed. The words which Walter de la Tremblade had spoken concerning the heart of woman, still rung in his ears; the probable causes of the peculiarities he had remarked in the conduct of Rose d'Albret, still agitated his mind; and he asked himself "Can she really love him? She who was clear-sighted, as well as frank, thoughtful as well as gay, generous, kind, liberal, can she love this man, who from youth till now has shown himself the same selfish, bold, confident, cunning, and presuming being? She used to see through him, and understand him when he came here as a youth, but a few years older than myself. It may be so, and perhaps the priest is right. If so, it were as well to renounce all without further hesitation, not to let her or any one perceive the hopes that are to be disappointed, the vain expectations that are to vanish at a breath, nor to call down that pity which is always more or less mingled with contempt, nor excite the scornful merriment of the winner in this perilous game. No, that I will not do; and yet this is a hard

and a bitter act to require of me, which may well justify some doubt and some delay. Hark ! there is my uncle's foot, I shall now hear more. The good old man has all his eyes open, where my interests and happiness are concerned. From him I shall hear the pure truth, undisguised and plain. I almost doubt that priest : yet he spoke fairly and candidly too ; but these men of the gown, dependent on great families, however virtuous and right may be their inclinations, gain a bias towards the views of their patrons, which often blinds their eyes to the plain course of justice."

Such were the thoughts of the young Baron de Montigni, till at length the old soldier Estoc threw open the door, and the commander limped into the room.

"Now lock the door, Estoc !" cried the good knight, seating himself in the chair which his nephew placed carefully for him ; "lock the door, we will have no more interruptions. I have a right to have my say too, Louis. *Ventre saint gris*, to use the language of the Philistines, we will have it out now, Louis."

"Most assuredly, sir," replied the young nobleman; "I will suffer no one to interrupt us. My uncle, the count, as once my guardian and my eldest relative, might of course command my first attention; but now that is over, you, my dear uncle, have the next claim upon me, and I will not allow any one to deprive me of the pleasure or the benefit of hearing your conversation and advice."

"Well said, boy! Well said!" cried the old commander. "Do you hear that, Estoc? He's no chicken now, eh? By my faith, Anthony will find himself mistaken. I like that well. You are right, Louis, to say, you *will not suffer* any one to interrupt us. That's the true tone. I have grown into a sort of some dependence here, thanks to my infirmities. I let them have all their own way; but, *parbleu!* it will not do, for they turn tyrants when they are over indulged."

"I have come here, my dear uncle," replied his nephew, "with all reverence and respect for Monsieur de Liancourt. But my days of pupilage are over. While I stay in his house

my chamber is my own, where I receive whom I like, when I like, and suffer not myself to be interfered with, (so long as I observe the courtesies of life,) when I am otherwise engaged. Whenever an attempt is made to restrain that communication with others that I may choose to hold, I leave the place, and take my lodging elsewhere."

"Right, right," cried the officer, "and if you go I will go with you, Louis. But sit down, Estoc. We have much to talk about, my boy. I trust you kept your word with me—I trust you promised nothing to the priest. He is a good man in the main; but shrewd, Louis, shrewd as a winter's night—pile up the fire, Estoc. You promised nothing, eh, Louis?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the young Baron. "I merely assured him, that no consideration on earth would induce me to do ought that would thwart the inclinations, or impede the happiness, of Mademoiselle d'Albret, but that, for the decision of my conduct, I must have time to consider, and that well."

"Ah no! I am sure you would not! Poor

dear little Rose, God bless her," cried the commander, "she deserves all tenderness. But if you did what they want, you would mar her happiness too, boy. Now let me hear what they sought of you. Then I will tell my tale."

De Montigni recapitulated, as well as he could, all that had passed between himself, his uncle, and the priest. He knew he could trust to those with whom he spoke; and he strove to give the words that had been uttered as nearly as possible without change. He might indeed add a running commentary of his own conclusions, but he falsified nothing, he exaggerated nothing. As he proceeded, his good uncle leaned his chin upon his stick, and listened without replying a word, though once or twice he struck the point of the staff sharply on the floor.

Old Estoc, however, was not so patient or so taciturn; for more than once, he uttered a quick oath, and murmured from time to time "Pardie! —Morbleu!—Coquin!" in tones which showed that he was not at all edified with the reported discourse of Monsieur de la Tremblade.

But when the young nobleman had done all, the good commander's smothered fire broke forth in a blaze, "Curses upon them for ever!" he exclaimed; "now they wonder there are Huguenots, and yet to see a Catholic priest playing knave and hypocrite in this way is enough to make any honest man turn Turk! I am ashamed of my brother, Louis, I am ashamed of my family, but I am still more ashamed of my religion. It's not honest, my boy! It's not honest, if it suffers its clergy to go playing such a double game, telling what suits them, and keeping back what does not suit them to speak. Now you shall hear the plain truth. You are heir of Liancourt, pure and undoubted. It was settled so long since, and nothing but your own act can deprive you of the lands."

"I suspected that such was the case," replied the young nobleman, "as soon as I saw such anxiety to induce me to sign papers in haste, and without explanation."

"Suspected!" cried the old commander. "Why you should have known it long ago,

if there had been honest men amongst us. I made my renunciation in poor Louise's favour—my sister—your mother, boy—when she married your good father—God rest his soul—and I took the Order of St. John. You are the heir, then, beyond all doubt; but Jacqueline, your aunt, my sister—she's a devil if ever one was—has never ceased working at my poor weak brother Anthony to deprive you of your right."

"She never loved me, I know," replied De Montigni. "I remember when I was a mere boy—"

"Loved you! that's not the point," exclaimed the commander. "She loves you just as well as anything else that stands in her way. It is that she loves herself, and loves herself in her son—the coxcomb! She has set her mind upon seeing him wealthy and powerful. She always looked upon money as the best of blessings. That is why she married old Chazeul, a man she hated and despised, only that she might be richer than her elder sister; and now this fellow has squandered half his father's estate, she

thinks to patch up a greater fortune still by getting for him Marennès and Liancourt. The last she never can get if you are not a fool, Louis, and the first she cannot get without she gets the last."

"This seems to me a riddle, sir," said De Montigni, thoughtfully. "I understand that this marriage is fully settled, with the consent and approbation of all parties; and surely the hand of Mademoiselle d'Albret, with her hereditary property, must be an object well worth striving for, even in the eyes of one who values wealth so much as my aunt De Chazeul."

"Ay, boy! ay!" cried the old commander, "so it would be, if she could get it. But the contract between the good Count de Marennès and your uncle is, that Rose is to marry his nephew, the subsisting heir of Liancourt. No name is mentioned, lest the heir should die in the meantime; but you were then, you are still, the subsisting heir of Liancourt, in virtue of your mother's rights as eldest daughter of my father, and my renunciation in her favour. If you put your hand to that paper you are worse than

Esau, for you not only sell your birthright, but your bride, for a mess of pottage."

De Montigni started up and paced the room for a moment with his hand clasped upon his forehead, and twice he muttered, "This is shameful!" He was tempted, strongly tempted, let what would be the result, to assert his rights at once; to claim his own without one consideration of the feelings of others; to exact the utmost sum of his inheritance, like a miser; to demand his bride willing or unwilling, under the engagement of her father.

But better thoughts first came to withhold him, and, as he reflected, difficulties appeared to impede him in such a course. The contract, doubtless, was in the hands of Monsieur de Liancourt. How could he prove it?—how establish his claim? The estates, indeed, he might withhold; his opposition might delay the marriage. But then he asked himself could he inflict sorrow and disappointment on Rose d'Albret; could he dash from her lip the cup of hope and expectation? Most likely she looked forward to her approaching marriage as a thing de-

cided beyond all chance of change. He had no substantial reason to suppose that she felt repugnance to it. Her mind was probably made up; her part taken; perhaps all the affections of her young heart engaged. Was he to be the person to blight all her prospects—to disappoint all her hopes? “No,” he thought, “no!” and resuming his seat by his uncle, he said, “This deceit used towards me, my dear sir, is very bad. It disgusts one with the world and human nature. Yet one consideration will probably make me yield to all their wishes, and forbear from exercising my rights, even now that I know them.”

“Phoo! Too!” cried the commander, interrupting him. “The boy is mad! Go, call our friend, Estoc. He must talk with him. There is a gentleman here, Louis—by the bye, he came with yourself—whom I met with once or twice in the old wars. He is as wise and good a man as ever lived—bating a bit of heresy in his notions, though scarce half a Huguenot either—a good soldier as any in France, and moreover a very prudent and clever person—a very wise good man. Indeed—none better. I

have been talking with him a long time since supper all about this affair, and you must take his advice, or at least listen to it. Depend upon it, you will find it good."

At first sight De Montigni shrunk from the idea of exposing all his feelings, nay, detailing all the particulars of his situation, to a comparative stranger, like Chasseron, one too whom he looked upon as an inferior. But before he could reply, Estoc had left the room; and, as he thought further, he remembered so much of bold decision in the man's character, so many traits of shrewd good sense in his conversation, that he began to think the opinion of such a person—totally independent of all passion and prejudice, knowing little of any of the parties, and who had seen so much of what had taken place upon his arrival—might be very useful as a corrective of any erroneous views which he himself might have adopted. He was free too, to accept his advice or to reject it; and he knew the good old commander too well, not to be sure, that Chasseron must have borne a high character in former days, to have obtained his confidence and

approbation, especially as a heretic—a sort of animal of which he was by no means fond. He waited then patiently for the return of the old soldier with his companion of the way, while his uncle, from time to time, addressed to him a brief adjuration, “Not to be a fool, and throw away fortune and happiness;” or, “Not to cast all the advantages which God had given him, into the lap of those who had played so foul a game, to wring them from him.”

In a few minutes the door from the anteroom opened again; and Chasseron entered, followed by Estoc. The old commander, in whom age and infirmity could scarcely tame the eager but generous impetuosity of disposition which had characterized him through life, rose up from his chair to greet their new guest and begin the subject at once. But Estoc thrust him down again, with unceremonious affection, saying, “Sit down, sir, sit down. You have been too much on your legs to-day already. You will have your wound breaking out again, especially if you tease yourself so. Monsieur de Chasseron knows all about it. But there is more going on

down below. Master Chazeul has just come down from a conference in the Count's chamber, and has sent off Etienne on horseback, to his mother, begging her to be here at an early hour to-morrow."

"Ay, Jacqueline must have a finger in the affair!" cried the commander; "and she will outwit us all, if we do not mind."

"I do not think so, sir," replied Chasseron, who by this time was seated between the old officer and his nephew. "It seems to me that the matter is very simple. Monsieur de Montigni, this worthy gentleman having known and heard something of me in times of yore, has thought fit to tell me the situation in which you are placed, and to ask my advice. I knew something of the facts before; for in the first place, I was well acquainted with the good Count de Marennes; nay, poor as I am, was somewhat related to him,—in a very distant degree, it is true; but still he was not above acknowledging the connexion. In the next place, as you may perhaps have remarked, I live with my eyes and my ears open; and as I

have been in this neighbourhood at least within fifteen leagues for some time, I have heard a good deal of what is going on. If therefore my counsel or assistance can do you any service, command it; for I owe you a good turn for that which you rendered me this morning. *Parbleu*, I should have been badly off if you had not come up."

"You are very welcome, my good sir," replied De Montigni; "and as my uncle has told you the circumstances, there is no use in entering upon them again. There are other things, however, to be taken into consideration, which you cannot yet know; I mean my own particular views and notions —"

"Ay!" cried the old commander, interrupting him, "the boy is fool enough, Monsieur de Chasseron, to talk of yielding to the wishes of these people, to think of abandoning all his rights, giving up to that coxcomb Chazeul both bride and estates! What think you of that? of letting them win the day by all their tricks and manœuvres? He has gone mad, I think! but *ventre bleu!* it shall not be so; for I will plead

first myself. I renounced in favour of poor Louise, who had the next right after me, not of Madame Jacqueline, who has got too much already."

De Montigni coloured slightly at his uncle's words, but he replied calmly and affectionately; "I have my own reasons, my dear sir, if you will but hear them. All the gifts of fortune are but as we estimate them; I will not pretend that I am without ambition, still less that to obtain the heart of Mademoiselle d'Albret I would not make any sacrifice. But I do not court her hand without her heart; and no consideration shall tempt me to cause her unhappiness by opposing her marriage, if—and I have no reason to doubt it—she feels towards my cousin of Chazeul, as a woman should feel towards the man on whom she is about to bestow her hand."

"That, young gentleman, is the question," said Chasseron quickly, while the old commander gave way to many a "Psha!" and other less decent interjection. "You have been ill used; and, evidently with a design of bringing about a marriage contrary to the previous con-

tract between the lady's father and your uncle, you have been kept at a distance, in ignorance of all the facts, while opportunity has been given to Monsieur de Chazeul to seek the lady's affections."

"To be sure!" cried the commander, "it was all done on purpose!"

"Under these circumstances," continued Chasseron, without noticing the interruption, "you would be perfectly justified in opposing the marriage; and with the evidence of your uncle here, of the previous contract, I do not scruple to say, it could not proceed. I applaud your delicacy and generosity, however; but the utmost that could be expected from the most noble-minded man would be, that you should insist upon the delay of a year, with full opportunity of seeking to change the lady's views, reserving to yourself the power to enforce or renounce your rights, as you may find her affected."

"But sir—but sir!" cried the commander.

Chasseron, however, waved his hand, saying, "Hear me out, my good friend," and then con-

tinued. "This would be the kind and generous course, even if you found that Mademoiselle d'Albret was a willing party to this alliance. The first question is, however, whether she be really so or not? How can you tell, that she does not consent with reluctance? How do you know, that she has not also been deceived? May she not have been taught to think, that her marriage with your cousin is in accordance with her father's designs? or even if no fraud has been played upon her, may she not have yielded from obedience to her guardian, knowing the power of those who hold, under the king, the *garde noble* of a female orphan? may she not even now, long for deliverance, and may she not bless you, if you step in armed with power to save her? Nay, more," he added with a smile, "may she not love you already?"

The colour rose warmly into De Montigni's cheek; and his heart beat quick; "Oh no, no," he cried, "I cannot hope such happiness. She was young, very young, when I went; not yet fifteen. We always loved each other, it is true; but as mere children."

"Love is a fruit that matures itself without the sunshine," replied Chasseron in a meaning tone, and then added frankly, "in a word, Monsieur de Montigni, I think it is so. I would not delude you with false hopes and expectations. That would be a bad return for the service you have rendered me; but I have known something of women, and I have in this case watched the lady accurately; not a glance of her eye has escaped me, not a varying shade of colour in her cheek. I think she loves you, I think she has now discovered it; and that, if you could see her at this moment, you would behold her weeping bitterly in her chamber over her hard fate. I think all this; but of one thing I am certain; if she have to-morrow to choose between you and Chazeul, she will not hesitate one moment, and her hand is yours."

The sensations of Louis de Montigni at that moment would be impossible to describe and difficult to conceive. Hope, joy, expectation, rose up to struggle in his breast, with sorrow, doubt, and apprehension. He dared not trust himself to the full tide of satisfaction and love.

He felt it impossible to believe that such happiness might be in store for him; and, contrasted with the dark and bitter feelings which had lately possessed him, the dream of happiness which now presented itself, though one which he had more than once indulged before, seemed too much for the lot of any mortal creature. A few moments' reflection, however, showed him that even if all that Chasseron said was true,—if the brightest hope of his heart were realised and the love of Rose d'Albret were truly his, there were still difficulties and dangers enough in the way, to mingle a full portion of bitter with the cup of human joy. Obstacles innumerable presented themselves to his imagination; and it seemed to his inexperienced mind almost impossible to triumph over the impediments which might arise to bar the path to happiness.

His uncle and Chasseron sat gazing at him for a few moments, while he remained in silence, meditating over the present and the future. The old commander could not comprehend his feelings; but Chasseron, with clearer eyes, read as

if in a book all the varied emotions of his heart, as they were written on his changing countenance. He suffered him then to reflect without interruption, till at length the young nobleman replied, "God send that it may be as you suppose! If it be so, sir, the decision of my conduct will be easy, for nothing but the belief that I should be wounding the feelings or opposing the happiness of Mademoiselle d'Albret, could prevent me from putting in my claim to her hand. But if I thought that she had one doubt or hesitation in regard to this marriage; that her whole heart did not go with it, that she only consented at the command of her guardian, and not from her own inclination, I would preserve every right I have, for her sake as well as for my own."

"Why, I tell you, boy, they have driven her," cried his uncle, "they have coaxed, and laboured, and striven, for these last two years. They have made her believe that my brother Anthony has the full and entire disposal of her,—that she is but as his horse, or his ox, or any other of his goods and chattels, which

he can give, or sell, or exchange, at his will and pleasure."

"That error may be soon proved," exclaimed De Montigni.

"Nay," said Chasseron, before he proceeded, "perhaps not so easily as you imagine. Depend upon it, these artful people, with power in their hands, will take good care that you have no opportunity of speaking with her alone, if they can help it. You have the means, however, of driving them to it, if you use them skilfully. Let them think that your decision entirely depends upon her——"

"I have told them so already," replied De Montigni.

"So far so good," continued Chasseron; "but keep to your text: refuse to discuss the subject with them at all, till you have ascertained her views. Demand an hour's private interview with her; and adhere firmly to that condition. Let it take place also, in some spot where you cannot be overheard——"

"The rampart is the only place," said Estoc; "on the west side there are no windows, and I

will plant myself at the door, so as to ensure there be no interruption."

"There be it, then," said Chasseron; "and this once gained, the decision of your fate is in your own hands. You may gain the day, too, if you like; only remember, listen to no arguments, enter into no conversation upon any part of the subject; but merely say that, when Mademoiselle d'Albret, unconstrained and free, assures you fully, with her own lips, in a private conference, that her happiness depends upon your making this renunciation of your rights, you are ready to do so, but not till then. Doubtless, they will tutor her,—doubtless, they will endeavour to work upon her mind by every argument and inducement—and many may be devised which we cannot foresee—but you, on your part, must use your opportunity to the best advantage: press her home with all the words of love and passion,—call to her mind the days gone by, the scenes, the affections of childhood; show her how shamefully you have been deceived; let her know the frauds which have been put upon herself. Make her

comprehend, that it was for you she was destined by her father; and, if you will, let her know your generous intentions; tell her that for her happiness you are ready to sacrifice not only your rights and your inheritance, but even herself. Then, *parbleu !* if you do not win her, you are better without her."

The old commander rubbed his hands, exclaiming, "He will win her, he will win her ! Don't be afraid ; she is quite ready to be won. She loves him already, man,—she always has loved him; only the poor little soul did not understand what it was."

"But suppose," said De Montigni in a musing tone, "suppose all this takes place as we would have it: suppose I am blessed to the utmost of my hopes and beyond my deserts, that I find her willing to be mine, unwilling to be his, what is the next step to be taken?"

"Ay, that is the question," replied Chaserson, "and one not very easy to resolve. I will give you my opinion, fairly, though it may be wrong. However, you may follow it or not as you like. Bold measures are fitted for

dangerous circumstances; and deceit, such as has been used towards you, will justify you in employing means which, were it otherwise, I would not advise, and you ought not to follow. If you find her disposed to give her hand to you, and you make open and decided opposition to the scheme which they themselves have devised, a thousand to one you will be driven out of the château, and all the influence of her guardian, even to compulsion itself, may perhaps be used to force her into a marriage with your rival. In the present condition of the country, it will be difficult to enforce your rights, so long as she remains here; by no means difficult for them, in the course of a year or two, to drive her, by persecution, into the arms of a man she hates. I would advise you, then, all these things considered, not to let them fully know, all that takes place between you. Give no decided answer the moment your interview is over; but say they shall know your resolution on the following day. Take advantage of the time; and, having gained her consent, and arranged your plan, fly with her

at once to the camp of the King. Beyond all doubt Henry, as soon as he is informed of her father's intentions regarding you, will bestow her hand upon you. He is a good-humoured man enough; frank and free; and has a weakness for all love affairs. He will be glad enough, too, to secure the support of the houses of De Montigni and Marennnes to his own cause; for at present he is a king without a kingdom; a soldier without money; and, by my faith, too, a husband without a wife. However, you need not fear his taking yours, for they do say he is over head and ears in love just now with another person; otherwise I would not answer for him."

De Montigni smiled: "You are no courtier, Monsieur Chasseron," he said, "and your plan suits me well; but there may be difficulties in the execution."

"Pooh, boy!—None, none," cried his uncle; "the business will be quite easy. Here are old Estoc and I as full of stratagems as the Duchess of Montpensier. We have had all our cunning bottled up for these ten years,

since I got that cursed wound ; and we'll arrange between us a plan for getting you all out of the château, so that no one shall know anything about it, for eight hours at least. The King is besieging Dreux they say ; and you can soon reach his camp."

" But can I persuade Rose to consent ?" asked De Montigni.

" To be sure, to be sure," answered the old commander ; " when she sees that there is nothing else for it, she won't hesitate. Besides, your taking her off to the King's camp, is not as if you were running away with her to marry her without any authority."

" Certainly not," said Chasseron ; " remember to impress that upon her mind : first, that it is according to her father's own disposition, that she gives you her hand ; secondly, that the King's right to the guardianship of a noble ward, is paramount to that of your uncle, and quite supersedes it."

" And you think," asked De Montigni, " that I may be perfectly sure of Henry's conduct ?"

" Perfectly," replied Chasseron.

"I will be answerable for that," said the commander in a grave and emphatic tone. "I will pledge my honour, which was never yet forfeit, that His Majesty shall bestow upon you the hand of Rose d'Albret, as soon as you reach his camp, and all the circumstances are explained to him."

"Well, then," said De Montigni, "my course is clear, and my conduct decided. If the hopes that you have raised prove just, and that sweet girl consents, we will fly as has been proposed. If not, and I am disappointed, I will make the renunciation which is demanded of me, raise my own retainers, join the King, and, fighting for my lawful sovereign, will wed myself to honour as my only bride."

"I trust, sir," said the good farmer, "you may ere long be able to serve the Bearnois, as they call him, not only with your own retainers, but with those of Marennes and Liancourt too."

"God send it—God send it!" cried the commander; "and I will get into the saddle, too, if the devil were in my hip instead of a pistol

ball. Come along, Estoc; you and I will go and lay out a plan for carrying off the lady, and I will let Louis know the result to-morrow by daybreak :—But mind you do your part well, my boy. No shyness—no diffidence—go right to the point at once. Tell her all about it, and let her judge for herself.—Now, Monsieur de Chasseron, Estoc and I will see you to your room,” and thus saying, they took leave of De Montigni, and retreated for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE must now give a space, a very short space indeed, to Rose d'Albret, who, after speaking a few moments with her uncle, the priest, and Chazeul, had retired to her own chamber in search of solitary meditation. There, however, she found her maid waiting for her, it having been her custom for some weeks, since Chazeul had taken up his residence at the château, to quit the rest of the party as soon after supper as possible.

"There, take off this stiff gown, Blanchette; give me a dressing gown, undo and comb my hair; and then you may go and gossip with Monsieur de Montigni's servants. They have just come from Italy, and will tell you, I don't doubt, how much prettier the girls of France are than those on the other side of the Alps. I will undress myself, when I feel sleepy."

"Indeed, Mademoiselle, I don't want to gossip with them," said Blanchette; "if I talk with anybody, it shall be with Alphonso, Monsieur de Chazeul's head-valet. He is a fine man, and a gay one, like his master. Ay, indeed, Monsieur de Chazeul is something like a man."

Rose d'Albret turned suddenly towards her, and fixed her eyes upon her face, asking, "How much has he given you, Blanchette?"

"Lord, Mademoiselle!" cried the girl, turning crimson.

"Yes, Blanchette, I wish to know," said Rose; "tell me exactly how much he has given you. These fine gentlemen think that a lady's heart can never be won rightly without bribing her maid; and therefore, just in proportion to the number of crowns you have received, I shall judge that Monsieur de Chazeul values my love. I am quite serious, so mind you reckon up exactly."

The girl evidently did not clearly see whether her mistress spoke ironically or not, but the tone of Rose d'Albret was so serious, that she

inclined to the latter opinion, and answered hesitatingly, "Why of course, Mademoiselle, he has given me some little presents at different times, as all gentlemen do when they are in love."

"Little presents!" cried Rose in the same tone, "why then he values me little. But count up, count up, Blanchette, how much altogether."

"Why, may be, perhaps a hundred crowns in the whole, Mademoiselle," answered the maid.

"A hundred crowns!" cried Rose d'Albret, "I am worth more than that; and I'll tell you what, Blanchette, you are a great fool if ever you say a word in his favour again, unless he gives you treble as much. So you look to it, undo my hair, and make haste."

The girl obeyed the orders she received, and then, by her mistress's direction, left her. The moment she was gone, however, Rose shook her head sadly, and burst into tears, exclaiming, "Alas, that they should thus fill me with suspicion! I am bought and sold like the goods of a market. No one comes near me that is not bribed or corrupted by some means. I

have nowhere to turn for advice or sympathy or consolation. What is the meaning of all this? Am I to believe that it is poor Rose d'Albret, he seeks? No, no, he would take other means to win love, if love were all he wanted. But I will know, I will see into the bottom of his heart before I give him my hand.—Give him my hand? Oh God! to think that the day is coming so soon!—But I will have some better insight; and if they use such art with me, surely I may be excused for practising some with them.”

Rose d'Albret leaned her head upon her hand, and thought long and bitterly; but her mind was now pursuing another course; the image of De Montigni had risen up before her. Nor would it be banished, though she was afraid to look upon it steadily. “He is very little changed,” she said to herself; “I can trace all the features of the boy in the man. He has lost his gay, light-hearted laugh, however—his cheerful look that spread light around him. He has grown grave and stern. Can he have suffered? Disappointed love, perhaps, has done

its sad work upon his heart. Oh that I could comfort him ! ”

She thought again, and other images seemed to present themselves; for, after a moment's silent musing, she started up, crying “ God forbid ! God forbid ! Ah ! what would come of it, if it were so ? Ruin, destruction, desolation to all perhaps !—Would I had resisted firmly from the first ! Yet I have promised nothing. I have been but passive in the hands of others. I have heard my fate announced, and made no answer. —’Tis a vain fancy after all. He hardly spoke to me, looked cold and askance—perhaps he is offended—no not offended ; grieved, mortified, disappointed, perhaps. Heaven ! where are my fancies leading me ? And yet I often thought when my eyes met his, that there was a look of tenderness, almost of pity in his face, mournful yet affectionate. Would that I knew what is passing in his heart ! Yet what would it avail ?—I know not.—It might perhaps avail to save us both from misery—or plunge us into greater. ’Tis useless to think of such things ; I will leave fate to take its course, and shape

my own as opportunity occurs. But I may at least strive to gain some knowledge of this man's character and objects; and, if I do assume a spirit different from my own to fathom the depth of his, surely it may be forgiven when the cause is so powerful. I fear—I much fear that I am wedding cold deceit, and treachery, and wretchedness. I will sooner die first—sooner resign all I have, hide me in a convent, if needs must be, and spend my life in prayer. But I will read his heart first. Perhaps I do him wrong. His motives may be generous and noble for aught I know; and yet I cannot but doubt it. If they were so, why such shrewd steps to surround me by those who do nought but praise him? There is a want of truth and nature in it, that brings suspicion whether I will or not. De Montigni's very coldness has more of love in it.—Poor De Montigni, what can have changed him so? I'll find some means of speaking to him, and, if I can, will give him consolation. He used to love me much when we were both young; and, if he have any deep grief at his heart, it will soothe and comfort him to

hear words of sympathy from the lips of Rose d'Albret. I loved him, too, always; and I could love him still—if it were right.”

But there she paused, and would not think how much she might love him. She was like a child who comes to the precipice's edge, peers over, and runs away in haste, lest he should see the full danger, and, with giddy brain, fall over.

“Hark,” she continued, “there is Chazeul singing in the rooms below. I will put out the light, and hie to bed. He is like the night-raven that fancied himself a nightingale. But I can stop my ears;” and, undressing hastily, she retired to bed: but sleep was far from her; and, for many an hour, she lay revolving plans of what she would say and do on the morrow. Still, thoughts she was afraid of, would intrude; still, before she was aware of it, her fancy was busy with De Montigni; still her repugnance to the union with Chazeul grew more and more strong, and it was not till half the night was spent, that at length she closed her eyes in sleep. She heard Blanchette come late into the ante-

room where the maid's bed was placed; she heard her breathe hard soon after, in the dull sleep of selfish content; she heard sound after sound in the château, indicating that all were seeking repose; and at length, when every other noise was still, the deep bell of the clock first striking one, then two. But the third hour did not find her senses waking.

It was daylight the next morning, though it was her habit to rise early, when her maid called her; and Rose at once perceived that there was a tale behind the meaning look on the girl's face. "Well, Blanchette," she said, "what is it? You have got something to tell. Speak it quickly, girl, I do not love to wait."

"Ah seigneur! mademoiselle," replied the maid, "I have heard such high words just now in the hall between the Count, and Monsieur de Chazeul, and Monsier de Montigni."

The colour fled from the cheek of Rose d'Albret; but she strove hard to ask in a calm and indifferent tone, what the dispute was about.

"That I cannot tell, mademoiselle," replied

the girl, who, like so many people in her station, only gathered sufficient information to alarm, but not enlighten; "All I know is, Monsieur de Liancourt looked very angry, and spoke very high, and the Marquis too; and Monsieur de Montigni replied coldly to my Lord, saying, 'I must hear that from her own lips, sir, with no one present to restrain her.' But when Monsieur de Chazeul said something I did not hear, the Baron turned upon him like a lion, and answered 'Silence, sir! or I shall forget you are my cousin.' You have heard my answer. Be it as you like. I seek not the conference you seem so afraid to grant, but without it, I sign away no right that I possess;" and then the Marquis replied, with a scornful air, 'you are mistaken, sir; I fear no conference between a lady who loves me and a boy like you. There is no great rivalry to dread. So, to keep peace in the house, you shall have this interview, and that right soon;' and then he turned round and came towards the door, behind which I stood, and so I came away."

"Hark!" cried Rose d'Albret, "there is

some one knocking at the ante-chamber door, see who is there ! Say I am not dressed, but will be so soon."

"It is Monsieur de Chazeul, mademoiselle," exclaimed the girl, after going out and returning; "he bade me tell you that the weather has grown warmer, the frost gone, and the morning is fair and sun-shiny, if when you are dressed, you will join him on the ramparts, for he wishes to speak with you."

Rose laid her hand upon her brow, thought for a moment, and then exclaimed, "I will go. Quick, dress me, Blanchette. I will go."

Her toilet was concluded much sooner than usual; and in a short time, avoiding the great hall, she was gliding along with a palpitating heart and unsteady step, by a passage which led direct to the walls. Before she opened the door between the house and the rampart, however, Rose d'Albret paused and meditated for a moment, pressed her hand upon her side as if to stop the beating within, and then saying, "So—so shall it be," she went out.

Chazeul was walking away from her, towards

the end; but he turned the next moment, and as soon as he saw her, hastened his pace to meet her. Rose advanced deliberately, but was not a little surprised, when, on coming near, Chazeul threw his arms round her and attempted to press his lips upon hers. She repelled him in a moment, with a look of indignant scorn, but the next instant she calmed the expression of her countenance, and said, "Nay, nay, Monsieur de Chazeul, you forget you are not my husband yet, and never may be. So take no liberties, I beg, or I go in this moment."

"And never may be!" cried Chazeul. "Oh, that is settled beyond all power of recall, sweet Rose. I have your guardian's promise, signed and sealed, dear lady, so that either Rose d'Albret is my wife or a cloistered nun for life."

"Well, that is one alternative, at all events, Monsieur," she answered; "not a very pleasant one indeed, nor one that I am likely to adopt; but still, do not consider me as your wife, till I am so; and take no liberties, if you would have me stay with you."

"Nay, this is but what all lovers take and grant," replied Chazeul; "however, be it as you will for the present, sweet Rose."

"Lovers!" repeated Mademoiselle d'Albret, "pray put the matter on its right footing, Chazeul. It is better that we should understand each other clearly. This proposed alliance is what is called a *mariage de convenance*. I look upon it as such; and so do you at your heart. I am not one to love easily. Doubtless I shall love my husband, when he is so; but in the mean time, all that either of us looks to is, a certain change in our position for the better. I view the matter quite reasonably; and so do you, though you think it right to affect a little passion. Not that I am insensible to the advantage of having a handsome husband, of reputation and distinction; nor you to that of having a pretty and well dressed wife; but, as the principal question, there are higher points involved than mere inclination. Deal with me therefore candidly, Chazeul, and do not make the unnecessary attempt to deceive me with a show of passion that has nothing to do with the affair."

Had Rose d'Albret assumed a warmer tone, Chazeul might at once have suspected her; but her calm and reasoning manner was so consistent with his own notions, that he aided to deceive himself; and judging her cold, and incapable of any strong passion, felt more secure than ever of the success of his schemes. "Well, Rose," he said, "I do love you, whatever you may think; and so do you love me, I believe. But to speak of these higher matters that you talk of: our marriage is certainly, under every consideration, the best devised alliance of the times. You know that the estates of Chazeul are very large, but still not large enough to give me that power and influence which I might obtain. The estates of Marennes are nearly equal; and therefore by my marriage with you, according to your father's and your guardian's wishes, I well nigh double my station and importance. But there is something more, dear Rose, in favour of this marriage; my generous uncle settles on me the whole estates of Liancourt, which add vast weight to all the rest, so that no member of the

Holy Union—ay, hardly Mayenne himself—will be able to compete with me in wealth and influence. Splendour and power are before us, Rose, such as princes might envy; and there is but one difficulty.”

“Ha! What is that?” cried his fair companion, in an eager tone.

“Why, it is this,” replied the Marquis, with some slight hesitation, “this boy, De Montigni, you know, has been sent for to sign the contract and the necessary papers. My uncle generously offers him, as his share of the inheritance, all the rich benefices at the disposal of the house of Liancourt. He may hold them, all but the bishopric, without entering the church; but if he chooses to take that profession—and he is fit for nothing else—the bishopric can be easily secured to him also, and then his portion will be even larger in revenue than mine. It is necessary, however, in order to avoid after-litigation, that he should sign a renunciation in regard to the estates; but this he refuses to do till—”

“Offer him something more,” cried Rose d’Albret, willing to try him thoroughly; “give

him the farm of Marcilly. You will scarcely miss it; and it will serve to make matters easy."

"It is a rich farm," answered Chazeul, shaking his head; "but that is not the question, Rose. He will not sign till he hears from your own lips, that it is your wish he should."

"I will speak to him," said the young lady. "I will speak to him directly."

"Nay, hear me first, sweet Rose," replied Chazeul. "Make your words short with him. Merely say, that this marriage having been decided and your hand promised to me, you are placed in a situation of great embarrassment by his conduct."

"I can say that with truth," answered Rose d'Albret; "but then," she added, "if I find he remains firm, may I not offer him Marcilly?"

"It is unnecessary," said Chazeul, with an impatient look; "for he has given his word, and will not break it, to sign the papers, if you but express a wish that he should."

"Oh, I cannot ask him," replied Rose d'Albret, "I cannot distinctly ask him, Monsieur de Chazeul."

"And pray why not?" demanded Chazeul, in some surprise.

"Oh, for many reasons, which I should think you would see at once," answered Mademoiselle d'Albret. "In the first place, it would be laying myself under an obligation which I may find it difficult to acquit. All I can do is to tell him truly what I feel, to tell him the embarrassment into which these events may cast me, and then to let him deliver me from them if he will."

"Ah! here comes father Walter," said Chazeul; but the announcement gave no pleasure to Rose d'Albret; for she felt that there would be more difficulty in concealing, from his eyes, what were the real feelings of her heart than from those of Chazeul, already blinded by his own self-confidence.

Happily for her, however, father Walter had fixed upon his own course; and trusting to the power which he had always possessed over her mind, he thought to bind her not by promises, but by principles, forgetting that when he himself favoured art and deceit, the slightest acci-

dent might discover the whole, and free her from the bonds which he strove to impose upon her. As he approached, he beckoned Chazeul apart, saying, "I have a message for you, Monsieur de Chazeul.—Good morning, my daughter, I would speak a word or two with you in a moment—now Chazeul," he continued, when Rose had advanced a step or two, "what has been done?"

"She does not exactly promise," said Chazeul, "but she owns that his conduct places her in circumstances of great embarrassment, and says she will tell him so—but I am sure she will do what we wish. However, perhaps it might be better to wait till my mother comes, before we grant him this interview."

"I do not know," replied the priest, thoughtfully; "if we do, it will be impossible to prevent De Montigni from having in the meantime some private conference with the good old commander, which he has not obtained as yet, for the old man is not yet up, and the young one is walking in the hall. But if they once meet to discuss this affair, the fact will come out, that Mademoiselle d'Albret was really destined by her father for

your cousin. No one can tell what effect that may have upon her, and therefore, it may be better to let their conference take place before he knows it. Once get his signature, and the matter is irrevocable. At present he is only vaguely aware that he has a claim to the estates. He makes some merit, indeed, with her, of his willingness, for her happiness, to resign his right, but that will not at all counterbalance the impression we have produced on her mind that, in marrying you, she is fulfilling the wishes of her parents, and the engagements that they had made. We had every right, indeed, to produce such an impression; for the moment that De Montigni renounces the estates in your favour, you become the person pointed out in the contract."

"Pshaw! never mind whether it is right or wrong," replied Chazeul; "so that the end be gained. But I see what you mean: you are right, we must get the interview over, before he gains further information. Then, his word once given, he will not shrink from it. I am sure she will do it, though she says that she cannot

distinctly ask him to consent, or lay herself under an obligation to him."

"That is all the better," replied the priest; "had she promised too much I might have doubted, from what I saw last night; but now go you to your uncle and make sure that there is no speech between De Montigni and the commander; and I will confirm her in her intentions, as I well know how. I will join you in ten minutes, and then you can send De Montigni up here."

Thus saying, they parted; and, with his usual slow and deliberate step, the priest advanced to the spot where Mademoiselle d'Albret was walking thoughtfully along the battlements.

"There is a question I wish to ask you, good father," said Rose, beginning the conversation herself, in order to guide it in the direction she thought best; "and I beg you would answer me frankly. My maid tells me, that she overheard high words this morning between De Montigni and my guardian. What were they about?"

"Truly, daughter," replied the priest, well-pleased that she had brought forward the sub-

ject at once, "I cannot tell you exactly what took place, for I was not present. But I know that the conduct of Monsieur de Montigni is giving the Count great pain, alienating his affection from him, and, unless something is done to convince him how wrong he is, I fear we shall have scenes of quarrelling and confusion, the curse of long and tedious lawsuits, ay, and perhaps, even bloodshed."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Rose, with unaffected horror. "Ah! that is very terrible. How can we stop it, good father?—What is the cause of all this?"

The priest was well satisfied to see the immediate effect his words produced. "No one can stop it, my dear child," he replied, "unless it be yourself. I believe your entreaties would have more effect upon the mind of Monsieur de Montigni than those of any one; and if you fail, matters must take their course. But, at all events, if you exert yourself to restore peace, you will have the blessed satisfaction of having done your duty. The case is this, my child," he continued, before Rose could reply :

“You are bound to give your hand to Monsieur de Chazeul, by all those obligations which must be most imperative upon a woman of good feeling and good principles. Your uncle is bound, also, by the tenor of his contract with your father, to secure to this your future husband the estates of Liancourt; for that purpose, and to avoid contentions and lawsuits, it is necessary that Monsieur de Montigni should make a renunciation of any claims, real or imaginary, to those estates. To take from him all cause for complaint, your guardian has most generously consented to give him revenues, to an equal amount, from other sources, and that immediately. But Monsieur de Montigni resists, talks high and loud, and the only thing that seems to have any effect upon him is, the thought of distressing you, who were brought up with him as a sister.”

Rose paused thoughtfully for a few moments, really moved and affected; and the priest, who watched each change of her countenance with keen and practised eyes, fully believed that he had gained the day. That supposition was

confirmed, when she said in a low and agitated voice, "Send him to me, good father, send him to me!"

"I will, my dear daughter," answered the priest; "for I feel almost sure that you will be able to persuade him to a nobler and more generous line of conduct. I need use no exhortations to you, daughter, to exert your greatest influence to restore peace in this family; but, let me say, that for such an object you may be well justified in overstepping, in some degree, the bounds which a timid and delicate woman generally prescribes to herself. For this high purpose, you may well urge him more warmly and vehemently than you might otherwise think reasonable and proper, and may hold out to him the inducement of contributing to your happiness and peace, with a view to restore tranquillity and comfort in a house where you have ever been treated as a daughter."

"Send him to me, good father," repeated Rose d'Albret. "I know not what I shall say or do, to effect the purpose desired; but in former days De Montigni was always generous

and self-denying; and if I can restore peace without any act of injustice, no personal sacrifice on my part will seem too much for me to make."

She spoke sincerely, with all her previous thoughts and feelings thrown into confusion; and, with a pale cheek and trembling frame, she seated herself upon the parapet, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"I will send him this moment, my child," replied the priest, convinced even by her visible agitation, that he had produced the effect he had desired.

"Stay, stay a moment," said the fair girl in a faltering tone; "I am troubled, father; let me recover myself for a moment."

"As long as you will," replied the priest; "but the sooner such a painful scene is over the better."

"Now," said Rose d'Albret, after a short pause, "now, good father; and let him be quick, for I fear my courage will fail."

"God's blessing go with your good work!"

cried father Walter, and with a low inclination of the head he retired.

At a rapid pace he sought the great hall, where he found Monsieur de Liancourt seated at a table, and pretending to write a letter, though the agitated shaking of his hand prevented him from tracing more than one or two words in a minute. De Montigni was walking up and down on the other side, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes bent upon the ground; and Chazeul was standing, playing with the hilt of his sword, near the door which led to the ramparts.

"All is right and safe," said the priest in a low voice to the Marquis as he entered. "He has not seen the Commander?"

"No, no," whispered Chazeul; "but the old man must be down soon. He is later than usual."

"The change of weather always affects his wounds," replied the priest; "but the sooner this is over the better.—Monsieur de Montigni," he continued, crossing the hall, "Mademoiselle

d'Albret wishes to speak with you on the ramparts."

"Very well," replied De Montigni, advancing towards the door. But pausing in the midst of the hall, and drawing up his head proudly, he added, gazing first at Monsieur de Liancourt, then at Chazeul, "Remember, gentlemen, I am to have one hour unwatched, unlistened to, unrestrained — ay, and uninterrupted; and if, in that time, Mademoiselle d'Albret distinctly asks me to sign these papers, I will do it before noon to-morrow. That is our compact."

"So be it," answered the Count; and Chazeul bent his head with a sarcastic smile.

CHAPTER IX.

THE heart of poor Rose d'Albret beat so fast as she sat upon the battlements, leaning her head and arm upon the stone-work of one of the embrasures, that she feared she would faint before De Montigni appeared. She longed eagerly to think over all that had taken place that morning, over her own sensations, over her past, over her future conduct. But her ideas were all in wild confusion; and she could not command her mind sufficiently to give them anything like order and precision. In a few minutes, however, she heard a step; and looking round towards the door which led across the drawbridge into the château, she saw De Montigni advancing towards her with a quick pace. She trembled to meet him, but yet as she gazed there was nothing stern or harsh or cold in his

countenance. It was somewhat grave, perhaps ; but still there was a light in his eyes, a look of hopefulness and satisfaction. It was more like that of the youth, who had left her five years before, than it had appeared since his return ; and, as he came near he held out his hand towards her, saying, “ Rose ! — dear Rose ! ”

She could not resist the tone and the manner ; but starting up at once, she placed both her hands in his, while the warm blood of emotion mounted up into her cheeks and forehead, and made her whole face one glow. The next moment her eyes were drowned in tears ; but De Montigni, without noticing them, drew her arm through his, and led her towards the further part of the rampart, while good old Estoc, with a heavy sword by his side, appeared upon the flying bridge, and leaned over the chains, looking into the space below.

“ Dry your tears, dearest Rose,” said De Montigni ; “ dry your tears, and calm your heart, and listen with your whole mind to one who has always loved you, as a boy, as a youth,

as a man—one who is ready at your slightest word to make any or every sacrifice, but to procure you one moment's happiness."

"Oh, De Montigni!" exclaimed Rose d'Albret, "do not speak to me so tenderly, do not speak to me so kindly, or any little calmness, any little power over my mind that I may hope to possess, will be lost altogether."

"Nay, that must not be, Rose," replied De Montigni; "I have need of your full attention, dearest Rose, and I have not come here to agitate or afflict you. I have sought this interview that we may understand each other clearly and fully, or rather, that I may know and be quite sure that, in anything I do, I am really consulting your wishes and your happiness, and that you are not deceived, as I have been, in regard to the circumstances of your position."

"Alas, De Montigni!" answered his fair companion, "I fear no explanation can deliver me from the terrible embarrassment in which I am placed. Indeed, indeed, I know not which way to turn or what to do. I would give worlds, I would do anything, to restore peace to this

family ; but I have no right to ask you to make sacrifices, I have no right to injure or to distress you."

"Talk not of sacrifices, Rose," replied De Montigni in a mournful tone ; "talk not of sacrifices to me. I am ready to make any, *all* for your dear sake. You have nothing to do but to command, and I will obey ; but it is upon the sole condition that I know it to be for your happiness ; and first, Rose, let me beseech you to tell me, how you conceive you stand regarding this marriage."

"I do not understand you," replied Made-moiselle d'Albret ; "how do you mean, De Montigni ?"

"We have but an hour, Rose, for all that we have to say," answered De Montigni, "therefore forgive me if I ask you plain and straightforward questions upon subjects into which I have, perhaps, no right to inquire ; and answer me candidly and frankly—I know you will. First, dearest Rose, is it love, or what you consider duty, that binds you to Nicholas de Chazeul ?"

"Duty, duty," replied Rose d'Albret eagerly; then placing her hand upon her brow, she thought for an instant, and added with a melancholy shake of the head, "Love? Ah, no! Alas, love has little to do with it, on either side!"

"Then almost all my questions are answered, Rose," replied De Montigni, taking her hand, and pressing it in his own.

"Nay, do not, do not, Louis," said his fair companion; "you agitate, you alarm me. I must do my duty, De Montigni; I have promised to endeavour to restore peace to this household. Remember, I must obey—I must fulfil the engagement entered into by my father."

"Then, Rose d'Albret," replied the young nobleman, "you are the bride of Louis de Montigni, and not of Nicholas de Chazeul: the bride of one who has loved you from infancy, not of a cold and heartless villain, who loves nothing but himself."

Rose d'Albret turned, withdrew her arm, and gazed upon him for a moment in pale and

speechless astonishment. The next moment her lips too turned white, and she would have fallen had not her lover caught her in his arms.

Poor De Montigni knew little of woman's heart, and could ill distinguish between the effects of mere emotion and distress. He carried rather than led her to the side of the wall, and seating her in one of the embrasures, hastened to reassure her, as he thought. "Listen to me, Rose, listen to me, dearest girl," he said; "De Montigni is not about to take advantage of any circumstances of his situation. It is for you, as I said just now, to command, and for me to obey. I am ready at a word to renounce my inheritance, my rights, my hopes—yes, Rose, even you yourself—if it be necessary for your happiness—I forgive you for having deceived me but now. If you now answer that you love this man, I am willing, ready to renounce all, even my newly awakened joy, that you may be at peace. I shall soon find repose on some field of battle."

"I have promised nothing," murmured Rose d'Albret to herself; "Thank God, I have pro-

mised nothing ! I have acquiesced in what they told me was a duty—nothing more—Oh no, no, thank God, I have done no more ;” and she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

After a moment, however, she dried them suddenly and looked up. “What was it you said, De Montigni ?” she cried ; “tell it me again ! It seems like a dream. Tell it me again. Surely you said I was not doomed to wed Chazeul !”

Louis de Montigni gazed upon her with a look in which surprise, and joy, and thankfulness gradually rose up like the increasing flame upon an altar. “Oh, Rose,” he said, “your words give me life. I did say you were not doomed to wed Chazeul. Your fate depends upon your own decision, and upon my actions, which your decision will rule. Listen to me, dear one, and I will in a few short words explain all. We shall have much to speak of afterwards, so mark well every point. My uncle, the Commander, will confirm all I say, if you doubt me.”

“Doubt you, De Montigni ? Doubt *you* ?”

asked Rose d'Albret, extending her hand to him. "I'd sooner doubt myself. But speak, Louis, speak. What have you to tell?"

"A brief tale, but a sad one," answered De Montigni. "In years long gone, your guardian, the Count, being then married to your aunt, and childless, the good old Commander made a renunciation, on my father's marriage, of all his claims to the estates of Liancourt in my mother's favour. I became, therefore, the presumptive heir; and your good father entered into a contract with my uncle, the Count, by which, in case of his death, you were to become the ward of Monsieur de Liancourt, and to wed the nephew to whom his estates naturally descended. Since then, I find, the Count has been persuaded by some persons—my aunt Jacqueline de Chazeul, I believe, and I fear the priest also—to favour a scheme for substituting Chazeul in place of myself. The particulars of the contract have been kept secret from you and me. I have been sent afar till the whole plot was mature; you have been taught to consider yourself as the promised bride of another. My

renunciation, however, was necessary, in order that, by rendering Chazeul the heir of the estates of Liancourt, it might give validity to your marriage with him, in the face of which stands my uncle's contract with your father so long as the estates are entailed upon me. For this purpose was I sent for from Italy, still kept in ignorance. But I had never forgotten Rose d'Albret. I shrunk from signing away my birthright without inquiry. Forgive me, Rose, forgive me, if I say I would have done anything to obstruct—ay, even to delay for a day or hour, your marriage with another. Then came the priest to talk with me; and from him—by a slip of the tongue, I believe—I learned my claim to the estates. In a private interview with my uncle, the Commander, I learned my whole rights, and the contract signed by your father. The whole villanous scheme was in short exposed; and from others rather than my own presumption, I learned to hope—what shall I say?—that Rose d'Albret might as willingly unite her fate with the companion of her girlhood, as with a man whom she must, when his

fraud is all discovered, in some degree condemn. Yet still, Rose, still, if your heart leads you towards him, speak but the word ! De Montigni is yours : without you I am nothing—fortune, rank, hope, life itself, is an empty bubble. All shall be resigned at your first bidding ; and to know I have made you happy by my own wretchedness, shall be the consolation of my remaining days, the one sole light of a dark existence, the friendly hand that closes my willing eyes in death. But if not—if you have been but constrained by a cold sense of duty—if you can find happiness with one who has always loved you—if you can give your heart in return for passion such as you deserve—oh Rose, oh, my beloved !”

He held out his arms to her as he spoke ; the wall shaded them from observation : he drew nearer, more near ; and Rose d’Albret, with a cheek of crimson, and overflowing eyes, bent forward her head and sobbed upon his bosom.

“Thou art mine ! thou art mine ! Thou dearest and best beloved,” cried De Montigni, clasping her to his heart. “But hark !” he

exclaimed, "there is the clock striking ten. We have but half an hour, Rose, to settle all our plans. Thou art mine, however; and it shall be a strong hand that tears thee from me."

"But, oh, De Montigni," exclaimed Rose d'Albret, withdrawing herself from his arms and looking up with apprehension in her face, "How will all this end? There will be strife—there may be bloodshed!"

"Fear not, dear one," answered her lover. "It is that which I would fain avoid; and if Rose d'Albret will deign for the sake of De Montigni, to overstep some cold proprieties, to trust herself entirely to one in whom she has acknowledged she can confide, to fly to the court of the King with her promised, her contracted husband, all difficulties, all dangers will be at an end; and in our sovereign's presence, with all the nobility of France to witness, we will pledge our vows at the altar, let who will gainsay it."

"To fly!—Oh, Louis," cried Rose d'Albret; but the next moment she bent down her eyes, placed her hand in his, and added in a low tone,

"But I am yours. Do with me what you will. I know you would not wrong me."

"Not for the joy of heaven," answered De Montigni. "But it is the only way, dear Rose, to avoid evils innumerable, strife, contention, and a thousand black and terrible things hidden from us by the dark curtain of the future. You must fly with me, dear Rose. You must fly with me this very night."

"To-night!" said the young lady; "to-night, Louis?" but, after a moment's thought, she continued, "Yet it must be so, I believe. To-morrow might be too late; and perhaps, they may not let me speak with you again, Louis."

"If they discover the nature of our conversation most certainly they will not," replied De Montigni; "but that we must conceal from them. I am not one to teach you deceit, dear Rose. God forbid that you should lose that bright candour which, to the mind, is what the hue of warm health is to the face. But these people have dealt wrongfully with you and me; to deliver you from their hands without long contention, there is but one way open; and we

are not bound to reveal our plans and purposes, our views and feelings, to those who would misuse their knowledge."

"But if they ask me?" said Rose d'Albret; "what can I do?—what can I say?"

"Say as little as possible, my beloved," answered De Montigni. "Enter into no particulars; merely tell them that you found me very resolute; but add, that my decision must rest with myself, after what you have said, and that you believe, upon due consideration of all the circumstances, I will do what is right. Be sure too, dear Rose, that you may safely say so; for I will do what is right to the utmost. Then if they try to investigate more closely, boldly refuse to answer. Say that, to tell them all the words which passed between us would be to betray my confidence, and you will not do it. Let them not lead you on from one thing to another, but keep your reply to as simple a statement as possible."

"I will! I will!" replied Rose d'Albret; "I know the danger of suffering them to entangle me in explanations or discussion."

“And particularly beware of the priest,” added her lover. “He is not honest, Rose, and has made himself their tool.”

“I fear it is so,” answered the young lady. “Even now he tried to deceive me, and partly succeeded.”

“Let him not do so again, dear one,” said De Montigni; “but there is another person of whom you must likewise have a care. I mean Madame de Chazeul. She will be here soon, and though, perhaps, I judged harshly of her while I was a boy, I find my good uncle, the Commander, her own brother, is but little more merciful to her character.”

“If she be coming, I will hide myself,” answered Rose. “Oh, she is a horrible woman! I always avoid her; I always abhor her company. I remember well things she has said that froze my blood. She scoffs at the very thought of goodness and honour; and with her serpent-tongue would have one believe, that no one is virtuous but in appearance; and yet I have heard her as bitter against others for light faults, as if she had none herself.”

"She is treacherous too, as well as malevolent, I find," replied De Montigni; "therefore avoid her to-day as much as possible, dearest."

"I have a bad head-ache, Louis, with all this agitation," said Rose; "but I am glad of it; for it will give me a fair excuse for lying down again. Burdened with the secret now in my bosom, I would not spend a day with that woman for the world. She would try all means, to make me tell her everything that has passed or force me to a lie to conceal it."

"Perhaps your plan may be the best," rejoined De Montigni; "but remember, dear Rose, you will have to wake and rise an hour after midnight, to fly with him who loves you."

"But how, Louis? how?" asked Mademoiselle d'Albret. "Remember in these times the gates are guarded."

"All that is settled and laid out," replied her lover. "Only be ready, dear one, to come with me at the hour I name. Bring little with you; leave jewels, and clothes, and all behind. All I seek, all I desire, is Rose herself; and though, perhaps, amidst these contentions, your guar-

dian may keep us long from our rights in your inheritance, yet De Montigni has enough for himself and her he loves; and I do not think that Rose will murmur at the want of splendour and high estate, if her heart be satisfied with its choice."

Rose d'Albret gazed at him with a bright smile, for she could not but contrast with pleasure, his thoughts with those of Chazeul. "I will be ready, Louis," she said, "and I will own, a crust of bread, with one who feels as you do, will be better to me than splendour and feasting with another. But there is one difficulty, Louis," she added, suddenly, while the smile passed away, and a look of apprehension took its place. "What can I do with my maid Blanchette? I thought the girl was honest and true, but these people have corrupted her. Every one who approaches me seems to have been gained by some means; and, with those who have not been so gained, they have long suffered me to have no private conversation. Even with the good old Commander himself, since he returned hither from Paris, about two months ago, they have

not allowed me to speak for a moment without some one being present. But Blanchette, what is to be done about Blanchette? She owned this morning that she had received bribes from Chazeul to a considerable extent."

De Montigni mused. "We must find some remedy, dear Rose," he replied at length: "a person who has received one bribe will generally not refuse another, and I must try to outbid Chazeul. But why should she have any part in the affair? Why should she know it at all?"

"She sleeps in my anteroom," answered Rose d'Albret. "I cannot pass out without her hearing me."

"There is the window, dearest Rose," said her lover; "it is but a few feet above the wall; and we must try that, if other resources fail. At all events, be at the window at one. I will come to speak to you there, and tell you what is arranged. You must be quite ready, however, dearest Rose; for our safety may depend upon a moment."

"My heart sinks when I think of it," replied

Rose d'Albret. "But yet, Louis—but yet, Louis," she answered, "I will not hesitate; for it is the only way to escape from a fate, of which I now feel, for the first time, all the wretchedness:—but how shall I know when you are beneath the window?"

"I will reach up and knock with the point of my sword," answered De Montigni, "and then we must speak low, lest any one should hear.—Hark! there are voices; the time, I suppose, is at an end. Adieu! dearest Rose, adieu! Be ready—pray be ready; for I feel sure that happiness will attend us. Nevertheless, let us now have grave and serious countenances; for we must not let them see, that there are any warmer feelings in our hearts."

"I shall not find it difficult to look grave, Louis," replied the lady; "for it is a hard necessity that drives me to do that which I do.—But, hark! they are surely quarrelling there!"

"'Tis Estoc will not suffer Chazeul to pass, I dare say," answered De Montigni.

"Go, Louis, go," cried Mademoiselle d'Al-

bret; "for heaven's sake, do not let them dispute.—Adieu ! adieu !"

They were at this moment on a part of the walls which, running round from the draw-bridge we have mentioned, passed under a defence which was called *the cavalier*, and was concealed by it from the windows of the building, as well as from the bridge and the rest of the rampart. De Montigni felt strongly inclined to press his fair companion to his heart before he left her; but he wisely refrained, and looking up to the top of *the cavalier*, he had cause to be satisfied with his own self-command; for just above the parapet, he caught sight of part of a man's head, evidently watching them.

Taking Rose's hand, then, he bent his head over it, whispering, "We are watched, Rose;" and, adding aloud, "Farewell, then, Mademoiselle d'Albret, I will consider all you have said," he took a step back, bowed low, and retired along the wall.

When he came within sight of the bridge, he found that, as he had supposed, the good

old soldier had thrust himself right in the way of Chazeul, and holding his sheathed sword in his left hand, seemed ready to draw it if the other attempted to pass him. Chazeul was in the act of turning to speak to some person behind; and De Montigni heard him exclaim aloud, "Call Monsieur de Liancourt!"

The moment, however, that Estoc caught sight of the young Baron advancing rapidly along the wall, he dropped the sword back into its place, and suffered Chazeul to come forward. The cheek and brow of the latter were fiery red, and his eye flashing with anger, as he exclaimed,

"This is very modest and proper indeed, Monsieur de Montigni! Do you forget that you are in your uncle's château, that you thus set a guard upon his walls to prevent his family from passing?"

"To ensure, sir, that they keep their word with me," said De Montigni. "I am quite well aware that I have but little more right than yourself to command in this place; however, do not let us quarrel, Chazeul," he added with

a serious air ; " we have things of more serious consequence to think of—at least I have."

" I dare say you have," replied Chazeul with a triumphant smile, judging from his cousin's countenance that all things had gone according to his own wishes. " Well, what is the result of your conference ? "

" Of that hereafter," answered De Montigni, passing on. " Nay, no words at present, good Estoc," he continued, seeing the old soldier eyeing Chazeul with an angry glance, " let the past be forgotten, if you would not grieve me."

" But one warning first to this young gentleman," said Estoc ; " Do not use such words again to a French gentleman, Monsieur de Chazeul ; for I give you fair notice, that, if I be the one on whom you spend them, I will send my sword through your body, as I have done to many a better man than yourself before now."

" You might not find me quite tranquil under such an honour, Master Estoc," replied Chazeul ; " but I will take care that you shall be chastised for your insolence, by those whom it may better become to meddle with you : " and

thus saying, he followed De Montigni over the bridge and through the passage into the hall.

To say the truth, the heart of Louis de Montigni was not quite at ease; for, how long he had been watched from *the cavalier*, and how much of what he had said had been overheard, he could not tell. The small part of the man's head which he had observed, did not enable him to judge who it was that had been playing the eaves-dropper; and he more feared the priest than any one else. But when he entered the hall he found father Walter there, and his uncle absent; and, the moment after, Monsieur de Liancourt himself appeared with an air of so much satisfaction, that De Montigni's apprehensions of discovery were at an end.

"Well, Louis," said the Count, "I trust you are satisfied, and that you have made up your mind to yield all this idle resistance, and sign the papers at last with a good grace."

"I have promised my reply before noon to-morrow," replied De Montigni with a frown upon his brow; for he was not well pleased with the pitiful art which had been used towards

him. "Before I sign anything, however, I must read the papers, and consider them well; it is but fair to know, what I am asked to do."

"You are mightily long and deliberate, Monsieur de Montigni," said Chazeul; "I understood that you were to make up your mind by what Mademoiselle d'Albret thought fit to say. Now I will take it upon myself to affirm, that she did ask you to sign them."

"You are wrong, Monsieur de Chazeul," replied his cousin, turning upon him sternly, "she did not."

"You are too frank and noble, my son, I am sure," observed father Walter, "to have recourse to an evasion; and we have every reason to suppose that, if the young lady did not actually ask you to put your hand to these documents, she did what was tantamount, and expressed some wish that it should be so."

"I have every reason to think so too," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "nay, indeed, I am sure of it. Come, Louis, be frank, and tell us what she did say upon the subject."

De Montigni mused for a moment, and then

replied, "Our conversation was long, sir, and I have neither will nor power to repeat it all; but the only words which she used, that could at all bear the interpretation you would give to them, were, as far as I can remember them, these; That she would give worlds, she would do anything to restore peace to the family, but that she had no right to ask me to make sacrifices, or to injure or to distress me."

"I think nothing could be more plain," said father Walter; "surely, my son, you cannot pretend to misunderstand her meaning?"

"I do not pretend to misunderstand her at all, good father," answered the young nobleman; "and I am in no degree disposed to cavil or to evade. I will not be hurried, however, in any of my proceedings. By what Mademoiselle d'Albret judges best for her own happiness, I will be guided; and, as I said before, ere noon to-morrow I shall be prepared to act decidedly. In the meantime I require to see these papers; and as, perhaps, it may be needful that I should have some one with me to explain to me, while reading them, anything I do not understand, I

should wish uncle Michael, or father Walter here, or both, to be present with me while I look over them."

"Oh, father Walter by all means!" cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "you know my brother Michael, though as good a soldier as ever lived, is nothing but a soldier. He does not understand these things at all."

"And I but little," rejoined the priest, "However, if Monsieur de Montigni is content that I should be his fellow-student, I am most willing to give him any explanation in my power."

"Madame de Chazeul is just coming into the court-yard, my lord," said a servant, hurrying up the hall and addressing Monsieur de Liancourt.

"I must go down to receive her," exclaimed the Count. "Then it is understood, De Montigni, that you will read the papers with father Walter? Fix the hour yourself, and you shall have them."

Thus saying he hastened away; and, after a few minutes' more conversation with the priest, De

Montigni went in search of his uncle, the Commander, whom he found walking up and down the corridor. Father Walter remained for an instant talking to Chazeul, but the old Commander had scarcely time to say to his nephew, "Well, boy, well, is all settled?" and De Montigni to answer, "To my heart's content, my dear uncle," when the step of Chazeul was heard approaching.

"Devil fly away with the fellow," said the old soldier: "when I found that you were with our dear little Rose, I got out of his way, for fear I should betray myself; and now here he comes again. Keep it close, Louis, keep it close! No stratagem ever succeeded but with a shut mouth.—Ah, Chazeul! are not you going to see your mother? She is in the court they tell me."

"She will be here directly, sir," replied Chazeul, "then I shall see her;" and, attaching himself to their party, he remained for the evident purpose of preventing any private communication between them.

CHAPTER X.

THOSE who have visited France in the present day, who have travelled over that rich and fertile land from end to end, who have journeyed through its least frequented districts, and examined into the nooks and corners which are but little exposed to the eye of the ordinary traveller, have yet, in general, but a very faint idea of the scene it presented at the period of which we write. Yet were they to bring history to aid their researches, from time to time, they would discover such fragments of a former day as might enable them to call up before their eyes a true picture of France during the wars of the League, as a Buckland or a Sedgwick, from the teeth and bones of long extinct animals, and from the leaves of trees that have decayed for thousands of years, are enabled to raise up

from the waves of time an image of a by-gone world, and people it with monstrous things, such as the eye of man probably never beheld in actual existence.

The whole country towards the end of the sixteenth century, torn with factions, desolated by rapine, stained with bloodshed, knew nought of commerce, manufactures, or arts; and even agriculture itself, on which the daily support of the people depended, was accompanied with terror and danger. Thus hamlets and villages, through wide districts of the most fertile parts of France, were swept away or left vacant; the houses of the farmer and the labourer had grown few, and were sometimes defended with trenches and pallisades against any of the smaller bands that roved the country; the greater part of the population was gathered into fortified cities; and the rest of the kingdom was dotted with châteaux and maisons fortes, generally at a considerable distance from each other, often in the hands of opposite factions, and always prepared for stern resistance against the attack of an enemy.

In the part of the country of which we have been writing, these castles of the old feudal nobility were somewhat numerous; and we must now beg leave to remove the reader for a time from the Château de Marzay to that of Chazeul, which lay, as he has been already informed, at no great distance. We must also go back to an early hour in the morning of that day of which we have just been speaking, in order that those who peruse these pages may be made acquainted with some events which weave themselves into the web of the history as we proceed with our task.

It was at an early hour then—perhaps a little before six o'clock; and, though there was a certain degree of grey mingling with the blackness over head, yet the light of a wintry morning had not sufficiently dawned to enable any one to see within the various rooms of the château. It was at this period that, in a small chamber, plainly furnished, and somewhat high up in one of the many towers of which the building consisted, there sat a very lovely girl, reading by the light of a small lamp a

number of old letters which seemed to cause deep and painful emotions in her heart ; for the tears streamed rapidly down her cheeks, and almost drowned her sight, as she continued that which seemed a sad and sorrowful task.

The eyes from which those drops poured so rapidly, were large and black as jet, but soft and yet lustrous, even when swimming in the dew of grief. Her hair too, and her fine eyebrows, were of the same inky hue, but her skin was beautifully fair and clear, with a faint tinge of the rose in the soft cheek. In years she might be somewhere between eighteen and twenty, delicate in form, yet with limbs so well proportioned and lines so exquisitely drawn by the pencil of the Great Artist, that every movement displayed some new grace, whether when leaning her head on her hand, she bent down over the page, or raised her look suddenly to heaven, as if appealing on high for comfort or for justice.

Her back as she sat was turned towards the door ; and her whole soul was evidently busy with the task before her—too busy as it proved ;

for she heard no step upon the stairs ; she heard no hand upon the lock ; she heard no movement in the room. She fancied that all in the house, but her own sad self, were sleeping quietly till the break of day. But it was not so ; for as she bent over the pages, the door behind her opened quietly, and an elderly woman, dressed in the extreme fashion of the day, though in a travelling costume, looked in, and then paused suddenly on seeing the light and the figure I have described. Her features were aquiline and strongly marked, her eyes keen and sunk, her figure tall and upright, but upon the faded cheek, even at that early hour, might be seen a glow of red, which, it needed no very practised eye to discover, was laid on by another hand than that of nature ; and her eyebrows also betrayed a debt to art.

She paused as I have said for a moment at the door, then advanced with noiseless step, the perfect silence of which was produced by the slippers of fur which she wore to defend her feet in travelling from the cold ; and approaching the fair reader from behind, she stretched

forth her long, and somewhat meagre neck, and peered over her shoulder at the papers on the table.

The next instant, she laid her large thin hand upon them with a firm and heavy pressure ; and the poor girl, starting up with a short scream, stood before her, with face and lips as white as those of death, eyes gazing with astonishment and fear, and limbs as motionless as if she had been turned into stone.

“What is this, Helen de la Tremblade?” said the Marchioness de Chazeul, in a sharp and ringing tone ; “What is this, girl ? Answer me this moment.”

“Oh, madam, pardon me ! pardon me !” cried the poor girl, falling at her feet.

“Pardon you ?” said the lady, with a bitter look ; “I will first see what I have to pardon ;” and she began to gather up the letters.

“Oh no ! no ! no !” exclaimed the other, starting on her feet again, and endeavouring to snatch them away. “You must not—no you must not ! Do with me what you will ; but do

not read those. They are mine, madam,—they are mine alone !”

But the Marchioness thrust her rudely back; till she reeled to the other side of the room, at the same time crying, “How now, jade ! Yours ? I will read every word. Sit down upon that stool, and move a step if you dare.—But I will secure you !” and, first gathering up the letters, she turned to the door, locked it, and walking back to the table laid the key upon it, while she drew a seat facing the poor culprit, and repeated, “Sit down, this instant !”

The unhappy girl obeyed, and covered her face, now crimson, with her trembling hands ; and Madame de Chazeul drawing the lamp nearer to her, began to read the letter which lay at the top, commenting, as she proceeded, in a low hoarse voice, like the croak of a raven towards the approach of day. “Ha !” she said, as she went on, “Chazeul’s hand ! Good ! I might have divined this. ‘Eternal love and passion !’—Fool ! There’s nothing eternal but folly.”

Farther on, however, she seemed to find

matter which occupied her more deeply; for her muttered words ceased, her brow put on a still heavier frown, and her small black eyes flashed with double fierceness. "How? how?" she cried, after nearly finishing the letter; "and is it so? What need I more? This is enough in conscience—Oh, base girl! But I will see more—I will see more!" and she turned to another page.

When she had read some way farther, she laid the letter down again upon the table, and gazed at it sternly for several moments, with thoughts evidently busy afar; and then turning to the poor girl, who sat with her face still covered with her hands, she said, "Come hither!"

The girl obeyed with slow, trembling, and uncertain steps, not daring to raise her eyes. When she was near, however, she once more sank upon her knees before the harsh and heartless woman in whose power she was, and lifted her hands as if in the act of supplication; but for several moments her lips refused their office, and no sound of voice was heard. At

length when she did speak it was only to say,
“Forgive me, oh forgive me!”

“Perhaps I will,” replied the Marchioness, in a somewhat softer tone, though at the same time there was a lurking sneer at the corner of her mouth that showed no very merciful sensations, “perhaps I will, if you instantly make a full confession. Tell me how all this happened, without disguise; and perhaps your shame may be yet concealed. Speak, girl, speak.”

“Oh, what can I say?” cried the unhappy girl, “you know all now; you see the words he used, the promises he made; you know that I was left entirely to his guidance. Often when you were away, he has been here for weeks together; when you were here, he was always suffered to be with me. Long I resisted—for two years; ever since my uncle placed me with you, has he tempted, and urged, and vowed, and I refused. But I was like a besieged city without assistance or support, and was driven to yield at length, when perhaps deliverance was at hand.”

"Without assistance and support, base girl!" cried Madame de Chazeul, "why did you not tell me? and you should have soon had aid."

"Oh, lady!" replied Helen de la Tremblade, "I did tell you at first, when his words were not so clear; and you scoffed and jeered at me till I dared not say more; and, after that, I learned to love him. Then, for his sake, I dared not speak."

"So it was my fault, was it?" said the Marchioness with a look of haughty contempt. "Thus is it ever; when a fool commits a folly, it is ever because somebody else did not counsel or help him. Was I the guardian of your virtue, girl?"

"You should have been," replied Helen de la Tremblade, a momentary spark of indignation rising in her breast as the worm was trampled on, "you should have been, against your own son."

"Ha!" cried the Marchioness with a flashing eye; but then, restraining herself, she demanded, "Who brought these letters? Who was the pander to your guilt?"

"Nay, do not ask me that," said her unhappy companion; "be angry with me, if you will; ask what you please about myself; but do not, do not vent your wrath on others."

"Will you say?" cried the Marchioness, in a furious tone. "This moment, will you say?"

"No, no!" answered Helen in a deprecatory tone, "I cannot, I will not. He knew not what he brought."

"You will not!" repeated the Marchioness sternly, "you will not! Girl, you shall! Are you not in my power?"

"You have no power to make me injure another," replied Helen mournfully; "I have injured myself enough; your son has corrupted, destroyed, betrayed me. With all these vows and promises written with his own hand, he is now about to wed another, whom he has no right to wed. Surely this is enough of misery; and I will not make my heart so sad as it would be, were I to add the ruin of another to my own."

"Vows! promises! no right to wed her, base girl! I will soon show you what are such

promises!" and, snatching up the whole packet of letters, she held them open to the flame of the lamp.

Contrary, perhaps, to the expectation of Madame de Chazeul, Helen de la Tremblade made not the slightest effort to stop her in the act. Whether it was that she felt her strength was not equal to contend with the tall and masculine woman, who was thus taking from her the only proof of those promises by which she had been betrayed, or whether it was the apathy of utter despair that restrained her, I cannot tell; but there she stood, motionless though not unmoved, with her eyes now tearless though full of sorrow, with her lip quivering but without a sound. Oh, who can tell the dark and terrible feelings of the poor girl's heart at that moment when, to all the bitterness of sin, and shame, and sorrow, and betrayed love, and disappointed hope and blighted affection, she saw destroyed before her face every evidence of the arts that had been used to deceive her, all that could palliate, if not justify, her conduct?

The flame caught the letters in an instant; and with a resolute hand the Marchioness held the papers till the fire nearly scorched her, then cast the fragments on the tiled floor, and, as they were consumed, turned with a bitter and a mocking laugh to the poor culprit, exclaiming, "Now talk of vows and promises!"

"They are written in heaven, if not on earth," replied Helen de la Tremblade, gazing at her with a degree of firmness that but enraged her the more.

"Heaven!" she exclaimed in a contemptuous tone, "heaven! do you dare to talk of heaven? Fool, if that is your resource, I will make you rue your conduct, at least on earth!" Then advancing to the door, she unlocked it, returned, and, grasping the poor girl by the arm, dragged her after her, down the stairs and through the long corridors of the château, to the outer hall.

Now came the bitterest moment of the whole for the unhappy victim. The hall was filled with attendants prepared for a journey. There were servants and armed men, the two maids of

Madame de Chazeul, and a gay page jesting with one of them. All eyes were fixed upon her as, dragged on by the Marchioness, she was brought into the midst of them; and oh, how thankful she would have been if the earth would but have opened and swallowed her alive!

“Undo the door!” cried Madame de Chazeul. “There, throw it wide! Now, strumpet, get thee forth, and carry your shame to any place where it may be marketable!”

“Oh God!” cried Helen de la Tremblade, clasping her hands in agony, “can it be possible? Have you—have you no pity?—At least let me take that which belongs to me.”

“Forth, wretch, forth!” cried the Marchioness, stamping her foot. “Drive her out, drive her out, I say!”

No one stirred to obey the cruel order; but Helen turned and waved her hand, roused into some firmness by the cruel treatment she met with. “That shall not be needed, Madam,” she said. “I go; and when you stand at the awful judgement-seat of God, with all your sins upon your head; when all that you have done

through life comes up before you as a picture, may you find a more merciful judge than you have proved to me."

"Away with you, away with you!" cried the Marchioness, adding the coarsest term of reprobation that in the French language can be applied to woman. "It is ever thus with such wretches as you: when detected in sin, they begin to cant. Away with you, I say; let us hear no more of it!"

Helen turned, and walked slowly towards the door; but the page ran after her, exclaiming, "Here is your veil, mademoiselle; you left it below last night."

Helen took it; but before she could thank him, the Marchioness strode forward, and dealt him a box on the ear that cast him upon the ground, exclaiming "Who taught thee to meddle, malapert?"

"Ah, poor boy!" cried Helen; and with the tears in her eyes, she quitted the inhospitable doors, within which virtue and happiness had been sacrificed for ever.

For some way, she walked along utterly un-

conscious where she went. We must not say, she thought either of her situation at the time, of the past, or of the future; for there was nothing like thought in her mind. It was all despair; she asked not herself where she should go, what should be her conduct, what place of refuge she should find, how she should obtain even necessary food. The predominant sensation, if any were predominant, was a wish to die; and any road which led her from that hateful mansion was to her the same.

This troubled state continued for some minutes, till a small wood concealed her from the castle; but still she walked on, or rather ran; for her steps, under the impetuous course of her own feelings, grew quicker each moment as she went. At length she heard the sound of horses' feet and the grating roll of carriage wheels, and a vague remembrance of having seen the heavy coach of Madame de Chazeul standing prepared before the gates, made her believe that she was pursued by that terrible woman, and, a sudden feeling of terror taking possession of her, she

darted in amongst the trees, and crouched behind some brushwood.

There she could hear the whole train pass by; and as they wound on down the hill, she saw the well-known colours and figures sweep slowly on till, as they were beginning to rise on the opposite slope, they came to a sudden halt, and a consultation seemed to take place. In a few minutes two horsemen detached themselves from the rest, and passed the wood in a gallop towards the château; but poor Helen remained in her place of concealment; and, as she did so, the tumultuous agitation of her heart and brain grew somewhat calmer, and a long and bitter flood of tears brought thought along with it. But, oh how terrible was reflection! how did she bemoan her own fatal folly! how desolate seemed her heart! how hopeless—how utterly hopeless—seemed her situation!

Where could she hide her head? she asked herself—where cover her shame?—where conceal herself from the eyes of all men?—who would help?—who would assist her?—who

would speak one word of comfort, of consolation, of sympathy? None, none. From the sympathy of the virtuous and the good she had cut herself off for ever! Was she to associate with the abandoned and profligate?—was evil to become her good?—was moral death to bring her mere mortal life? Ah, no! she would sooner die, she thought, a thousand-fold sooner die; and she abhorred herself for her weakness past, more than many who think themselves virtuous, would abhor themselves for actual crime.

“Why should I stay here?” she asked herself at length. “I am an outcast—a beggar; my father and mother in the grave; my uncle’s face I dare not see; I have no one to seek—I have no road to choose; the wide world is before me; I must trust myself to fate;” and rising up, with the feeling of desolate despair taking possession of her once more, she followed the path before her, then turned into another, then wandered along a third, and thus went on for nearly an hour-and-a-half, with several of the country people who passed her, turning round to gaze

in surprise at so fair and delicate a creature straying abroad, with a vacant air and tear-stained countenance, at so early an hour of the morning.

At length she felt weary ; and with listless indifference to all that might befall her, she seated herself on a stone, at the foot of a wooden cross, which had been erected by some pious hand beneath a high tree-covered bank, down which the snow, now melting under the first warmth of spring, was slipping from time to time in large masses, or sending forth a thousand small streams, which rendered the road almost like the bed of a river.

Poor Helen heeded it not, however ; she took no notice of the cold and the wet. The bodily discomforts that she suffered had but little effect upon her ; and, if she perceived them at all, they came but as things which recalled to her mind more forcibly the hopeless desolation of her situation. Thus, after a few minutes' rest and thought, she once more bent down her beautiful head upon her two fair hands, and wept long and bitterly.

While she was thus sadly occupied, the sound of a horse's feet striking the plashy ground at a quick pace came down the lane. She gave it no attention, and the horseman dashed passed her, apparently without noticing her. It was not so, however; and about a hundred yards farther on he pulled in his rein, and turned back again. In another minute he was by her side; and she heard a kind and good-humoured voice exclaim, "What is the matter, young lady, has any one injured you?"

Helen de la Tremblade looked up, and beheld in the person who addressed her a man of a frank and open countenance. He was dressed in a brown suit of a plain rough cloth, and seemed to be a substantial countryman of about forty years of age, though his beard and moustache was somewhat grey. There was a look of pleasant and intelligent interest on his face, which might have brought back some hope to her cold heart, for it spoke of sympathy; but she replied in a sad and bitter tone, "Alas, I have injured myself," bursting into a fresh

gush of tears as the words of self-reproach passed her lips.

The man gazed at her for a moment in silence, seemingly puzzled by the contrast between her dress and her apparent situation. At length he exclaimed, "Parbleu! you cannot stay here, my poor girl. You seem a young thing, and well nurtured; what can have brought you into this state?"

"My own fault, as well as the cruelty of others," answered Helen de la Tremblade.

"Well, we all have faults," replied the man, "God forgive us for them! and as for the cruelty of others, we are none of us good enough to afford to be severe, especially when errors are freely acknowledged. But tell me, can I do anything to help you? I have little time; but I cannot find in my heart to see a fair young thing like you left to perish by the roadside."

"Oh!" cried Helen starting up; "if you would but give me shelter for a single night, till I can think, till I can give my mind some

order, you might save me from destruction. Doubtless," she added, seeing him pause as if in hesitation, "doubtless you have a home not far off; doubtless you have wife and children,—daughters perhaps; and should you hear my prayer, be sure God will bless and protect them, if ever they fall into misery like me. I am not intentionally wicked, indeed; weak I may be: nay, weak I am, but not vicious; no, not vicious, whatever you may think."

"Pardie, few of the fine dames of France can say that!" exclaimed the horseman. "But the truth is, my poor young lady, my home is not very near. But I would fain help you if I could. Where are your father and mother? Better go home to them, and if you have offended them, try to soften them with tears. They must have hard hearts if they resist."

"They are in the grave," answered the unhappy girl.

"And what is your name, poor thing?" inquired her companion.

She paused and hesitated; but the next

moment she said, "Why should I conceal the truth? my name is Helen de la Tremblade."

"What!" exclaimed the farmer, "the niece of the good priest at the Château de Marzay?"

"The same," answered Helen with a mournful shake of the head.

"Then you have been residing with the old Marchioness de Chazeul," rejoined the other, adding, "at least the servants told me so."

"Till this morning," replied Helen with a sigh; "but I am now a houseless outcast."

The horseman dismounted from his beast, and took her kindly by the hand; "Alas, poor child," he said, "you have been, I fear, under a hard ruler. I know something of this woman; if not personally, at least by hearsay; and I can easily believe that she has been harsh and unkind."

"But I was first in fault," answered Helen, interrupting him frankly, "I deserved reproach, perhaps punishment, but oh, not so terrible as this."

"Why, what was the cause?" asked the

farmer. "Nay, then," he proceeded, "as your cheek glows, I will ask no further questions. I seek not to distress you, young lady, but to serve you; and if I can, I will place you in security. You cannot—you must not remain here. Heaven only knows what might happen to you. But how I am to get you hence I cannot tell. I have not time to go back with you to Marzay, and —"

"Not for existence," cried Helen de la Tremblade, "no, not for all that earth can give, would I set my foot within those walls."

"Ay, I forgot," rejoined the farmer, "she must be there by this time."

"Oh not for that—not for that alone," exclaimed the poor girl with a shudder, "you do not know—you cannot tell all."

"Well," replied her companion, "perhaps you may think differently by and by. But in the mean time, how am I to get you hence? I am going to the village of St. André, some eight leagues distance, and have no conveyance but the horse I ride. Stay," he continued, "I will go on a short way, and see if I can find a

cottage or farm-house where we can hire horse or cart."

"Oh do not leave me," cried Helen, "you are the first who has spoken kindly to me; and perhaps—perhaps if you go you may not return."

"I will, upon my honour," replied the farmer; and setting spurs to his horse, he was away over the opposite hill in a few moments.

The time went heavily by with Helen de la Tremblade. She asked herself, "Will not he too deceive me?" and when nearly twenty minutes passed without her companion's return, her heart sank, and her eyes once more filled with tears. It had seemed, while he was near her, that she was not totally abandoned, that she had still some human being to hold communion with, that she was not, as she had at first believed, shut out from all sympathies. She knew not who he was, it is true; she had no information of his name, his station, or his character; but he had spoken kindly to her, he had shown feeling, humanity, compassion; and perhaps it was that which had made her fancy

she had seen in his countenance all the higher and nobler qualities of the mind and the heart. She longed for his return then; and in counting the weary minutes and listening for every sound, she in some degree forgot the oppressive weight of the past and future. At length, tired with expectation, she rose and walked along the road to see if he were coming; and, as so often happens, no sooner had she given way to her impatience, than she saw his figure rising over the hill.

“ I have got a man and horse with a pillion,” he said, riding up to her, “ I cannot promise you, Mademoiselle de la Tremblade, any long or sure protection, but I will engage to put you in a place of safety for a night or two. During that time you will have the opportunity of thinking over your future conduct. I am not a rich man, but, on the contrary, a very poor one; yet you shall share what little I have in my purse, as I must leave you to your own guidance towards nightfall; and if you like to confide in me fully, when we stop three hours hence, you will find that you have not misplaced your trust. Think of it as we go;

for I cannot speak with you of such things, while your good squire is with you. Mayhap you might find worse people in whom to place your confidence than Michael Chasseron."

Helen did not reply; for while he was yet speaking, an old peasant with the horse which had been promised came in sight; but she mounted gladly, and rode on beside the companion, whom she had known barely an hour, with a heart relieved, though not at rest. As they went, too, he spoke to her of many things, in plain and homely terms, but with wide and various information, and with a winning kindness and consideration for her sorrows, which made her feel, that all the world were not harsh and bitter as those she had just left. She herself said little, but she found herself constrained in gratitude to answer such questions as he thought fit to ask; and, although he inquired nothing directly regarding her situation, and she believed she told him nothing, yet, in fact, long before they reached their halting place he had learned nearly all that he desired to know, not by her words, but by his own conclusions.

CHAPTER XI.

THE moment Helen de la Tremblade had quitted the château, Madame de Chazeul entered the carriage which stood prepared for her in the court, and accompanied by what she considered a sufficient guard, set out upon her way towards the dwelling of her brother. Her thoughts, however, were not of the pleasantest kind. At first, they were all in confusion; but, through the turbid mass of her angry sensations, there came an impression, a consciousness, that she had too much given way to the violence of a disposition, originally irritable and passionate, which all her cunning and art had not been able to bring effectually under controul. This perception grew stronger and more distinct as she became cooler; but, for a time, she attempted to justify to herself what she had done, on the score of policy. "If Rose d'Albret were to

hear of this," she said, "we should have new difficulties, and all my well-laid schemes would be frustrated; so that it was necessary to get the girl out of the château as quickly as possible. She will never venture to go to her uncle's, surely! Oh no, she was ever timid and frightened; she will hide away in some corner till she finds a new lover."

This reasoning did not satisfy her, however. She saw there was danger in the course she had pursued. She asked herself, what was she to say to Walter de la Tremblade when he inquired after his niece, whom she had taken some two years before, as what was then called, *Demoiselle de compagnie*? Was she to tell him what had occurred. Was she to relate her own conduct? Was she even to acknowledge that her son had seduced the unhappy girl under her own roof, with opportunities afforded by her own negligence, and not the best example, by her own conduct? If such things came to his ears, what course would he pursue? Might he not blast all her projects; destroy, even by a word, all the glorious fabric which she had been

building up for her son's ambition? He was not one who could be cajoled and cheated; he was not one who could be overruled or thwarted. Art to art, and cunning to cunning, he was her match; and she felt it. No, the matter must be concealed from him entirely, at least till her schemes were all successful, and Rose d'Albret was the wife of Nicholas de Chazeul. Then, she thought, he might do his worst; the prize would be gained, the struggle accomplished, and his power at an end.

Next came the question how this concealment was to be secured. If Helen did not go to him at once—which the Marchioness little believed she would—might she not write the tale which she would be afraid to speak. That was not at all improbable. Nay, destitute as she had been driven forth, it seemed certain that want would compel her to do so immediately; and then the whole must be discovered.

As these thoughts presented themselves to her mind, she formed her plan with her usual decision; and, bidding one of her women order the coachman to stop, she called to the door of

the vehicle, two of the mounted men who accompanied the carriage, and in whom she thought she could rely, and directed them to return immediately to the château.

"Seek for the girl Helen," she said, "you will soon find her; 'tis not a quarter of an hour since she went. You can take some people on foot with you, to hunt about in the neighbourhood. Carry her back home immediately; and tell Mathurine to lock her up in her own room and keep her upon bread and water till I return. I have been somewhat too severe with her, though she must undergo some punishment. Away, as hard as you can gallop, and mind you find her, or you shall repent it. Here, Theodore, speak with all the people, and tell them, on their lives, not to utter one word at the Château de Marzay of what has taken place this morning. I and Mademoiselle de la Tremblade will soon make it up again."

The man to whom she last spoke promised to obey, though, understanding his mistress well, he clearly saw that she had some other end in view than merely reconciling herself to her own

conscience for her over severity, and the carriage rolled on once more upon its way.

About four hours after, it reached the château de Marzay, having met with no farther impediments by the way than such as were presented by roads naturally rough and uneven, which had become one mass of mud and dirt from the united effects of a sudden thaw and long neglect. In the court-yard of the mansion she was received by her brother, the Count de Liancourt, who informed her, according to his version, of all that had taken place in the château since the arrival of De Montigni. He told her the truth, in fact, as he believed it; but nevertheless, he gave her a completely false view of the whole affair; for it is ever to be remarked and remembered that, of all the treacherous liars against whom we have to guard in our course through life, our own heart, with its whole host of subtilties and fallacies, its prejudices, its vanities, and its self-delusions, is the most dangerous. Men would rarely, if ever, be deceived if they did not aid most strenuously to deceive themselves, and what is more curious

still, it often happens that when we are most busy in attempting to put a fraud upon others, we are most actively cheating ourselves. There is always a traitor in the council whenever we quit the straightforward course of truth and rectitude.

Monsieur de Liancourt assured his sister, as she alighted from her carriage, and walked up the staircase to the hall above, that the only difficulty was with De Montigni, and that Rose d'Albret had used her influence upon him to induce him to consent.

"Has she?" said the Marchioness, thoughtfully; "not very vigorously, I should fancy."

"Oh yes, indeed," replied Monsieur de Liancourt; "for I watched their parting from *the cavalier*, which was built at the time of the siege, where I could see them, but they could not see me. It was as formal as a court ceremony. He kissed her hand, and made her a low bow, and said something which I did not exactly hear, but the last words were, 'I will consider all you have said.'"

"So, then," said Madame de Chazeul, "Made-

moiselle Rose hears reason at last ! But what is it that has done this ? she always seemed as cold as ice before, and barely willing."

"Oh ! the fact is," replied the Count, "Rose was never without ambition. I do not pretend to say she is in love with Chazeul ; but he took care to inform her of the high and splendid fate that would be hers as his wife, and that was quite enough."

"It may be so," answered the Marchioness ; "ambition is at the bottom of every woman's heart ; but yet if De Montigni were as handsome as when he went away, I should have fancied that love and folly might have had a hard struggle against ambition and good sense. I would not have suffered them to have any private conversation, if I had been here."

"It was the only way to get De Montigni to consent," rejoined Monsieur de Liancourt ; "besides, Chazeul has no cause to fear the comparison. He is a man with knowledge of the world and of courts. The other is still a boy, with no knowledge of anything but books and philosophy."

"Not the man to win a woman, indeed;" said Madame de Chazeul, with a curl of the lip; "but we shall see."

As the last words were on her tongue, they entered the corridor where De Montigni and Chazeul were walking up and down with the old Commander; and an amusing scene took place between the Marchioness and the rest of the party. She had made up her mind as to the part which she was to act towards her nephew; and the moment she saw him, she exclaimed, with a joyous air, and holding out her open arms towards him, "Ah, my dear Louis, welcome back to your native land! What a truant you have been! How like he is to poor Louise!" and she embraced him, apparently with all the tenderness of a mother.

The old Commander growled a savage oath or two, and, when she turned to him, looked her full in the face, saying, "He is like Louise; and that is why I love him."

"Ah, Michael," said the Marchioness, "you always were a bear, and always will be one. It is lucky you do not bite as well as growl."

"I may bite some day, if I am provoked," answered the Commander.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Madame de Chazeul, laughing as heartily as if her mind were free from all the weight of cunning schemes and violent passions. "You see, Louis, he is just the same as ever. We have not been able to tame him since you were gone. It is a sad, ferocious beast—a bear. And so you have come to grace the wedding?"

"I hope so, Madam," replied De Montigni gravely; but his thoughts were busy with the question, of what should be his demeanour towards the artful woman who was now before him; and, while she said a few words to Chazeul, expressive of no particular affection towards him, the young Baron made up his mind, to seem won by her manner, and to attach himself as much as possible to her during the day, in order to keep her from attacking Rose d'Albret, who, he feared, might not be so well able to play her part against the Marchioness as himself.

Madame de Chazeul, however, was pertina-

cious too, and one of her first inquiries was for Mademoiselle d'Albret.

"I will send and call her," answered Monsieur de Liancourt; "let us go into the hall; perhaps she may be there."

They did not find her, however; and the servant he sent to summon her, soon returned with the tidings, that the young lady had gone to bed again with a bad headache.

"I will go and see her," said Madame de Chazeul. "Poor dear Rose, all the agitation of these preparations is too much for her; and she moved towards the door leading to Mademoiselle d'Albret's apartments, though the old Commander exclaimed, in a surly tone, "You had better let her alone! Your tongue, Jacqueline, never cured a headache, I am sure."

The Marchioness, however, was stopped by the entrance of another person with whom she had also to play her part; for just as she was quitting the hall father Walter appeared, and advanced towards her. Her face immediately assumed an air of friendly regard, and giving him her hand, she said, "Good morning, father, how



fares it with you? Our dear Helen would have come with me, but she was somewhat indisposed. Nothing of consequence, however; and perhaps she will join us to-morrow, or, at all events, on the day of the marriage." Then suddenly breaking off, in order to avoid any further inquiries on that subject, she lowered her voice, and inquired, "How go things here, father? De Montigni is restive, I find. Are you sure of Rose?—quite sure, father? My brother, Anthony, continually blinds his own eyes; but you see more clearly."

"I think there can be no doubt," replied the priest, "not that I pretend to say that the lady loves your son; she regards the alliance but as a family arrangement conducive to her interests, and the only means of giving peace and quietness to the house. For these reasons she has urged De Montigni to sign the renunciation and the contract, and I think he will do it—nay, I feel certain he will. They would hurry on the affair before your arrival, though I thought it would have been better to wait. But from the course things have taken, no harm has

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been done; and, perhaps, it may be as well now, when you see the lady, not to derange the impression which has been produced."

The Marchioness mused. "How comes it, good father," she asked, "that Chazeul has not made himself loved? I fear he has been playing the fool with other women; for he is not reputed to want success upon a lady's heart, when he is inclined to try. I must give him some lessons; do you think that any of his love affairs have come to this girl's ears? That should be prevented till the marriage takes place."

"By all means," said the priest, "but I know of none from which there is any danger."

"And I of but one," rejoined the Marchioness, "but I will take care to keep that from her. One may be justified in using a little violence for such an object."

"Assuredly," answered father Walter, "anything in short, but the spilling of blood."

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" cried the Marchioness, "I bear the woman no ill will for loving Chazeul; but if I were to have her carried off

and shut closely up for a few days, there could be no harm in that."

"It were the best means," replied father Walter, "unless her family be sufficiently powerful to make dangerous resistance."

"There is no fear of that," answered Madame de Chazeul, with a quiet smile; "but I will go and see Mademoiselle d'Albret."

Thus saying she quitted the hall, while father Walter advanced towards the group of gentlemen at the other end, who had been conversing together calmly enough during his interview with the Marchioness. That lady, however, returned after a very brief absence, saying that Rose d'Albret was trying to sleep; and, put upon a wrong track as she was, both by her brother and the priest, she attached herself during the rest of the morning to De Montigni, endeavouring by every artful means, to possess herself of his whole views and intentions, and at the same time to convince him, that he was giving pain to Rose d'Albret by his hesitation in regard to the signature of the papers.

One of the reasons why the game of life is

not unfrequently won by the simple and the honest against all the arts of the politic and the wily, is perhaps that, in this game, as in no other, the most skilful and calculating can never tell what cards may be in the hands of the adverse party. I say one of the reasons; for there are many, and amongst them is the belief, from which cunning people can never free themselves, that others are dealing with them in the same way that they would deal, if their relative situations were reversed.

Madame de Chazeul, however, had studied De Montigni's character from youth, and knew that he was generous and kindhearted. She, therefore, like father Walter, endeavoured to work upon him, in the first instance, through his affection for Rose d'Albret. She spoke of her gently and tenderly, called her "poor Rose," and represented the slight indisposition under which she was suffering, as entirely proceeding from some agitation and vexation she had undergone in the morning, affecting at the same time to be ignorant of the nature of that agitation, but leaving him to draw his own conclusions.



De Montigni, as the reader knows, had the secret in his own keeping, and internally mocked at all the policy which the Marchioness displayed; for there is nothing so contemptible as discovered cunning. He resolved, however, to turn back Madame de Chazeul's art upon herself, and found even a pleasure in foiling her with her own weapons.

"Well, my dear Madame," he answered, "I trust that, by this time to-morrow, Rose will have no farther cause for anxiety on my account."

"Indeed, how so?" asked the Marchioness.

"Because by that time," replied De Montigni, "all will be positively settled."

"And of course as Rose could wish," added the Marchioness.

"As far as I understand her wishes, it shall be so," said De Montigni; "but I do not desire, madam, what I say to you to be repeated; and now will you tell me frankly, for I know you are well aware, what is the value of these benefices which my uncle offers me?"

"At least equal to the value of the estates,"

replied Madame de Chazeul: "more, indeed, if you take in the Abbey of Chizay in Poitou; but that I believe was promised to good Monsieur de la Tremblade—not exactly promised, perhaps; but I know he was led to expect it."

"No one shall break a promise for me," replied De Montigni with some emphasis on the words. "They can be all held, I believe, without taking the vows."

"Your uncle holds them," answered Madame de Chazeul, "and he has taken no vows that I know of—unless it be, never to drink thin piquette when he can get strong Burgundy, or to eat pork when he can find venison."

De Montigni smiled, and was going on to stop the questions of the Marchioness by inquiries of his own, when the summons to dinner was heard, and the whole party descended to the hall below.

When the meal was over, father Walter put the young Baron in mind, that they had to read over together the papers, in regard to which there had been so much discussion. Although De Montigni much wished to occupy

Madame de Chazeul as far as possible during the day, he could not well put off the engagement; and whispering to the old Commander, to watch her closely, he retired with the priest to his own chamber. There, several long documents were spread out before him; and he proceeded, with pen and ink at hand, to peruse the whole, clause by clause, demanding minute and lengthened explanations as he went on, and taking notes of every point of importance. Father Walter was somewhat surprised at the calm and steady good sense he displayed; and, though De Montigni expressed neither consent to nor dissent from any of the items, was more and more convinced every moment, that the young Baron had made up his mind, to accept the benefices and renounce the estates.

In the meanwhile the Marchioness de Chazeul had drawn her son away from the rest of the party below, and walking with him on the rampart, was giving him those lessons of which she had spoken to the priest. Not a word did she say of Helen de la Tremblade; nor a word of reproach or reproof did she utter; but her

conversation turned entirely upon his demeanour towards Rose d'Albret.

"Ah, Chazeul!" she said, after taking a turn backward and forward, in the tone of one jesting with a friend, "thou art a silly lad, I fear, and little knowest how to push thy fortune with woman-kind."

"Nay, my good mother, it is not thought so," replied Chazeul, drawing up his head and smoothing his ruff; "I am no seeker after the fame of such conquests, but I have some reason to believe they are not so difficult as they are supposed to be."

"True," answered his mother, "doubtless with the light Parisian dame, the gay lady who has known a thousand lovers, thou art a potent assailant; but she is like a city which has been besieged and taken a thousand times, till all the outworks and ramparts have been battered down, and the place is right willing to surrender at the first sight of artillery. With a maiden fortress, however, such as this fair Rose d'Albret, thou art but a poor general, otherwise you would have gained the citadel long ago."

“Meaning her heart; but how would you have had me conduct the siege, dear mother?” asked her son, pursuing the simile she had used.

“By assault, Nicholas!” replied the Marchioness; “prayers, tears, vows, daring, anything. Here neither wall, nor bastion, nor redoubt, is to be gained but by vigorous attack. Women, who by experience have not gained a knowledge of their own weakness, are always more resolute in resistance than those who have learned that they cannot long hold out when closely pressed. Storm and escalade are the only ways with such castles, Chazeul; and if you were to pursue till doomsday your cold and formal rules of siege, you would make no way, but find defences grow up in proportion to the feebleness of the attack.”

“Why, you would not surely have me treat Rose d’Albret as any common woman of but light fame?” said Chazeul. “You are much mistaken, mother, if you think that is the way to win her.”

“Nay, I would have you treat her very differently, foolish boy,” replied the Marchioness.

“With a woman of light fame, as you call her, you may well trust to her to make at least half the advances. With a young ignorant girl you must make them all yourself; for, be sure, she will not. One or the other must be bold and daring; and the only question is, on whose part it shall be. The practised dame will take her share on herself, the inexperienced girl expects it all from you. We all know in our hearts, Chazeul, that we do not dislike an impetuous lover. Though we may chide, we easily forgive even very grave offences, so that love be the excuse. The story of the Romans and the Sabines was a good allegory of women’s hearts; men must take them by force if they would have them.”

“Oh, her heart is mine sufficiently for all the purposes of wedded life,” replied her son. “I know her better than you, my good mother, and am well aware that more things enter into the calculations of that little brain than you imagine.—I would not spoil her,” he continued, “with too much devotion. You women grow exacting as you imagine you have

power; and I would have her think the tie she has upon me is not too strong, lest she should one day think fit to use it strongly. It is enough for me to know, that she sees clearly her own interest in a marriage with myself. She will not expect, in a wedding of convenience, all that court and exclusive attention which some brides demand; and every little loverlike act will come with tenfold force."

"All very wise and very prudent, good youth," replied his mother, "if you had no rival, no competitor in the game that you are playing; if there were no obstacles, no difficulties in the way. But here our great object is time and secure possession; and had you, by bold and ardent eagerness, advanced your suit so that she had no escape from marriage with you, we should have found both herself and De Montigni more tractable, depend upon it."

"She is tractable enough," replied Chazeul, "it is De Montigni alone that holds out; and she has done her best to persuade him, I am sure. A rival, do you call him? but a pitiful rival to me! and as to obstacles and difficulties,

whatever have existed are swept away already. She has done her best to persuade De Montigni to sign; and I am sure he will do so."

"Well," said the Marchioness, "we shall see. I think he will, but do not feel so sure. He was somewhat too smooth and courteous just now; and I thought I saw a somewhat double meaning in his words, as if he hoped still that Rose might raise up some impediment. —We must suffer him to have no farther speech with her alone. It is a dangerous plan."

"There is no fear of Rose," replied Nicholas de Chazeul peevishly. "If it be anything like love on his part for her that you dread, it is a vain fancy. Had you seen him meet her last night, you would have been cured of such dreams. He was as cold as if we had imported a statue from Italy, fresh cut in the stone; and not all Rose could do would warm him."

"Ay, before others," rejoined the Marchioness, "but perhaps when alone it might be different."

"No, no," said Chazeul, "my uncle watched them; and it was just the same: all formal bows

and stiff courtesies. — But who is this, comes riding here?" he continued, gazing from the battlements. "A trumpet at full speed, with a green scarf! News from Mayenne, upon my life! I must go down and see."

Thus ended a conversation which has been repeated here with reluctance; but it is as needful, in painting nature, to show the mind and character of the bad as of the good, to display the thoughts and reasonings of the wicked as of the virtuous. Neither does the portrait of Madame de Chazeul serve little to exemplify the times in which she lived. France was then full of such. Intrigue of every kind, amorous and political, was then at its height, and most of the infamous and daring deeds that were done, either for the gratification of private passions, or for the attainment of great public objects, were suggested by women.

The man who had been seen riding so sharply towards the château, proved to be a trumpeter sent by the Duke of Nemours with letters to Chazeul, notifying the march of the army of the League to relieve the town of

Dreux, closely besieged by the King, and calling upon him to join it, with all his retainers, as a battle seemed inevitable. The despatches spoke in glowing terms of the force under Mayenne. It was nearly double in number, they said, to that which Henry of Bourbon could bring to oppose it, and a glorious victory would soon be achieved, in which all honourable men would long to take part. Chazeul, however, sent an ambiguous answer; for he was not one to sacrifice his private interests even to the triumph of his faction, and he was resolved to possess the hand of Rose d'Albret, and to see the estates of Liancourt and Marennes secured to himself, before he quitted the Château of Marzay.

More than one hour elapsed before Louis de Montigni had terminated his examination of the papers with the priest; and even then, with all father Walter's skill, he could not extract from him any promise, either direct or indirect, to sign them. To the eager questions of Madame de Chazeul the priest could but reply, "I cannot tell what he will do. I believe his mind is made up, to act as we could

wish; but his demeanour is certainly somewhat strange. He has taken notes of everything, and remains pondering over them. Our only plan is to watch the Commander, and to cut them off from any private communication with each other. Noon to-morrow will show us what we are to expect; and in the mean time we must guide things as we can. Have you seen Mademoiselle d'Albret?"

The Marchioness replied in the negative, and it was not till one hour before sunset that Rose came forth from her chamber to breathe, for a few minutes, the fresh air. She was pale, and evidently suffering; and whenever Madame de Chazeul attempted to question her, she pleaded indisposition as an excuse for talking little. She gazed forth from the ramparts over the wide country which the château commanded, with a feeling of dread, mingling strangely with hope and joy. The bright sunshine of the first day of spring was glittering over the whole; but on the verge of the southern sky was hanging a dark and heavy mass of clouds, rising up in all sorts of fantastic forms; and Rose could not help

associating her own fate with the aspect of the day, and thinking that the bright gleam of summer, which had come to her heart after a long and chilling winter, might, perhaps, be soon blackened by storms, the clouds of which were already within sight.

Soon after the party was joined by De Montigni; and the two lovers strove hard to conceal their feelings under the appearance of cold indifference; but Rose found the task so difficult that she remained only a few moments after the young Baron's appearance, and then once more retired to bed.

Madame de Chazeul remarked the whole; and suspicion rose up in her mind. But the field of probability is wide and dim, so that her doubts found no fixed point to rest upon; and she contented herself with whispering to De Montigni, "Were I a man, I would not long give a lady cause to fly me thus."

The young nobleman made no answer, but turned away, as if somewhat offended; and this slight indication of temper was used by Madame de Chazeul to deceive herself. "Were he not

acting contrary to the girl's wishes," she said to herself, "he would not take offence at my supposing it."

The rest of the day passed without any occurrence of importance; and the only points which Madame de Chazeul thought worthy of notice at supper, were the absence of Estoc from the table, and that Louis de Montigni confined his conversation almost altogether to father Walter, with whom he talked a good deal in a low tone. She herself was tired with early rising and a journey. The Commander soon retired to rest; and she followed without delay, as soon as she was certified by private information, from one whom she had set to watch, that the good old soldier was actually in his bed. Satisfied that all communication between Montigni and himself was at an end for the night, she laid herself down to seek that repose which is unfortunately, but not unnaturally, as often the portion of the hardened in vice, as of the virtuous and the good.

CHAPTER XII.

I HAVE said something of the same kind before; but I must repeat that, unless it be in a mud cottage containing one room, and at the most two individuals, it scarcely ever happens that there are not several, very various scenes proceeding in the same house, at the same time; and when the house is large, and the inhabitants many, these scenes are multiplied and diversified even to infinity. Tragedy and comedy, broad farce and startling romance, have each their separate chambers, and their several actors; and while, in the halls of the Château of Marzay, all the cunning drama of intrigue which we have described, found a stage, the acts of many another play were being performed in the chambers allotted to the servants.

Loud and uproarious merriment had its part;

and, as is too frequently the case, the vices and follies of their superiors were imitated by the inferiors, presenting pictures too gross and unpleasant to be given in this place. We must, however, turn away from the principal personages of our tale, to notice some events which took place, during the hour of supper, in a part of the château somewhat distant from that in which Monsieur de Liancourt's family was assembled.

In a room not far from that of Mademoiselle d'Albret, with the door ajar, a lamp upon the table, and a piece of embroidery in her hands, sat Blanchette, the maid of our fair friend Rose. She paid but little attention to her work indeed, though she affected to be very busily employed, but her ear was turned frequently towards the passage, apparently listening for every sound. At length it was gratified by hearing a step; and the moment after, the valet of Monsieur de Chazeul pushed open the door, and entering the room, closed it behind him. He was a tall swaggering, debauched-looking personage, and into the particulars of the first greetings

between himself and Blanchette, I shall beg leave not to enter. Suffice it to say, that they betokened a degree of intimacy which Rose d'Albret had certainly not the slightest idea existed between her maid and any other person.

After a while, however, the valet inquired, "Well now, tell me, my pretty Blanchette, all that your mistress has been saying to you to-day."

"Indeed, I shall not," replied the maid, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I don't intend to tell you, or Monsieur de Chazeul, anything more."

"Come, come, don't be silly," cried the man, "for I must soon get back; now the caprices of you ladies," he continued, with an affected air, "are very pretty and interesting in affairs of love, but very troublesome in matters of business."

"Well, I shan't say anything more," said Blanchette, with a determined air, "so there is no use of talking about it."

"Ah, ha, then," rejoined the valet, "I see how it is; your mistress has told you not to tell."

"Indeed, she has not," answered Blanchette ;
"but she has taught me to value myself more
highly than your master does."

"How so?" demanded her companion ; "I am
sure my master values you as highly as I should
like to see him. What did she say to you
about it?"

"Ah, I don't mind telling you that," said the
maid. "She asked me last night, when I was
saying something in favour of Monsieur de Cha-
zeul, what he had given me ; and, when I told
her, she said she was worth more than that, and
that I was a great fool if ever I opened my
mouth about him again, unless I got three
times as much."

"Upon my word the lady has some notion of
life," cried the valet ; "one would think she
had spent her whole days in Paris ; and she is
right too, Blanchette, we servants should never
put too low a value on ourselves, for we have
more in our power than people imagine. How-
ever, I can promise you that when Monsieur de
Chazeul is married to your lady, you shall have
three times as much ; and in the meantime—"

"Ay, ay," replied Blanchette; "a fish in the plate is worth three in the stream, Alphonso. Promises are made of wind, and it is very difficult to convert them into anything else."

"Well, but listen to me," said the man. "I was just going to say, in the meantime Monsieur le Marquis has sent you five-and-twenty crowns. Here they are," and he placed a little leathern bag in her hand; "now, there's a dear, beautiful girl, tell me all your mistress has said to you to-day, especially after her long talk with Monsieur de Montigni, this morning."

"That is soon told," answered Blanchette, putting the money in one of the pockets of her apron; "she said nothing at all, except that she had got a headache, and would go to bed again."

"*Peste!*" cried the valet; "is that all the news that you can give? Surely you have made out something more. What humour did she seem in?"

"Bad enough," replied Blanchette; "I think Monsieur de Montigni must have done or said something to offend her, for I could see she

had been crying, and she was silent and dull, just as she is when she is angry with me."

"I dare say he did," rejoined the valet; "for he is an obstinate colt, and takes as long to drive where people want him, as an ass loaded with sand—But hark, there is some one walking in the passage."

They listened, and a heavy step sounded along the corridor, advancing in measured time from one end to the other, and then back again, like that of a sentry keeping guard. It passed and repassed twice, not a little to the annoyance of the two worthies shut up in the room together. But at length the valet, who did not wish his absence to be remarked and commented upon amongst the servants, declared, "Whoever it is, I must go; but do you shut the door after me quickly, Blanchette, then no one need know that you are here."

"I am afraid Mademoiselle will call every moment," answered the girl; "but people must have time to take their supper, you know."

"I must go, upon my life," said the man, who took a great deal more interest in his own posi-

tion than in hers. "Now, Blanchette, I will pop out as soon as he is passed; you close the door quick behind me, and he will not see whence I come."

He accordingly waited till the steps sounded close to the door, and then as soon as they had gone by, opened it, and went out as noiselessly as possible. But his footfall did not escape the quick ears of the old soldier, Estoc, who turning instantly, not only perceived who it was, but also marked the room from which he came. He said nothing, however; but, as soon as the valet had left the passage, advanced at once to the door which had just been closed, and, opening it without ceremony, went in. As may be supposed, this sudden apparition troubled the maid a good deal; and, though an impudent and unprincipled girl, she was not yet sufficiently veteran in vice to keep her cheek from growing red, or her hands from shaking.

"Well, Mademoiselle Blanchette," said Estoc, "I thought I should find you here."

"Indeed, sir!" said Blanchette. "I generally sit here."

"Not always, Blanchette," replied Estoc; "but I saw your lover leave you, and so I came in, just to give you a word of advice." Blanchette coloured and bit her lip, but made no reply; and Estoc went on, "you are in the wrong line, if you wish to make your fortune, Mademoiselle. Now, if you will follow my counsel, you may do something for yourself. Go up to Monsieur de Montigni's apartments about eleven o'clock to-night, for he wants to speak with you."

"Lord! Monsieur Estoc," cried the girl; "I would not go up to any gentleman's room at night for the world. I wonder how you could propose such a thing!"

"Oh! I make no difficulty in proposing it," answered Estoc, "when you make none in receiving a gentleman's valet at night.—But Monsieur de Montigni only wants to speak with you on business, to ask you one or two questions, and, perhaps, to make you a present of a couple of hundred crowns."

"I am very much obliged to him, sir," re-

plied the girl, affecting a cold and modest air; "but I would rather speak to him in the day, if he has no objection."

"That can't well be, Blanchette," answered Estoc; "for Monsieur de Montigni intends to go away to-morrow; and he will not have time previous to his departure. Now, my good girl, remember you are in my power, for don't you suppose that, if this business comes to the ears of Mademoiselle d'Albret, you will stay in her service a minute after."

"Well, I have done nothing that's wrong," replied the girl boldly; "and I don't care what any spy says of me, not I."

"Well, we understand each other," rejoined Estoc. "Give me an answer in one word, will you come, or will you not? Your reply will decide your own fate."

"Well, sir, well," said Blanchette, who saw that the plan of outfacing the old soldier would not succeed; "I will come if you will be there too."

"Oh, that I certainly shall," replied Estoc; "for I have got some papers to look over with

Monsieur de Montigni—so I may tell him you will come?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Blanchette, “I will;” and, with a significant nod of the head, Estoc left the room.

Without going near the supper hall, he retired at once to the apartments of De Montigni, where he waited for about half an hour, till he was joined by the young nobleman, to whom he related all that had taken place. “The girl is not to be depended upon,” he added in the end, “and I think it would be better when we have got her, to lock her up here for the night.”

“Nay,” answered De Montigni, “that were a violent proceeding. I have told my servant Joseph to watch her well, and we shall hear his report. If I find that she has been holding any communication with these people, since you saw her, we must devise some means to blind her eyes. But, now Estoc, is all the rest prepared?”

“Everything,” replied the old soldier. “I have the guard to-night; and I have picked my men from those who will not fail us. Your

servants have their orders; and, were it needful, we could make all the rest prisoners in the castle here; but that you would not like to do."

"Certainly not," replied De Montigni. "I think at present they have no suspicion; and I trust that we shall be able to execute our scheme without either difficulty or strife. Be with me when this girl comes, Estoc, and now go and take some refreshment; but above all things caution my good uncle Michael to make no effort to see me to-night, and to seek repose at his usual hour. Depend upon it there are watchful eyes upon us; and, of all things, we most avoid suspicion."

While he was speaking, a sunburnt man who had accompanied him from Italy, made his appearance, and bowing low with a smile, he said, "I have watched and listened to some purpose, Monsieur le Baron. As soon as supper was over, Mademoiselle Blanchette drew aside Alphonso, the Marquis's valet, and whispered with him long in the corner of the hall; I saw they were very eager, but could hear nothing; and as I was resolved to know more, I

crossed suddenly behind her back, just as the man was saying 'I will wait for you at the bottom of the stairs.' I could hear no more, for they both stopped."

"That is enough, that is enough," replied De Montigni, "we must remedy this, Estoc; but I will have the whole plan ready, when you come again."

At half-past ten, Estoc was in the young nobleman's room; and at eleven, Blanchette might be seen creeping stealthily up the stairs with a lamp in her hand, while in the dark corridor below, concealed in one of the recesses of the windows, stood Chazeul's valet, waiting for her return. Almost all the rest of the household had retired to bed; and the château remained perfectly silent for a quarter of an hour, while the man continued his watch in darkness. At the end of that time, however, Blanchette and her lamp were once more seen upon the stairs; and, whispering to him as she passed, "Quick, quick, old Estoc is coming down directly, he is now speaking to the Baron at the door," she hastened on, through that

passage, across the lower hall, and up a short flight of steps towards the apartments of Chazeul. The valet followed quickly, and introduced her into the dressing room of his lord, who was waiting with some impatience for the intelligence she was to bring.

"Well, well," he cried, as soon as she appeared, "what is it he wishes, Blanchette? Let us hear all that took place."

"When first I came in," said Blanchette after a pause to take breath, and a little coquettish panting and holding her hand upon her heart, "Monsieur de Montigni spoke me very fair, and promised a great deal. He said he knew that I was in your interest, sir, and he did not wish me to betray my trust, but that he was very anxious indeed to have an hour's private conversation with Mademoiselle before noon to-morrow. He asked me if she was yet asleep; and when I told him she was, and had been so for these two hours, he turned to Estoc and said, 'that is unfortunate;' he then looked again to me, and calling me close to him, he spoke almost in a whisper, saying, 'that if I

would engage to get him the interview early to-morrow, before the rest of the people are stirring, he would give me two hundred crowns, and, as an earnest, put these into my hand. He told me particularly to be very secret, and not to say a word to any one, which of course I promised as much as he could wish."

"You did quite right, you did quite right," replied Chazeul; "but did he let you know what was his object in seeking this interview? He must have said something more, for you were long with him."

"Oh, I asked him, noble sir," replied the girl, "what I was to tell my mistress, he wished to see her for; but he replied somewhat sharply, that it was no business of mine; and then I said I was sure Mademoiselle d'Albrêt would ask; but that if he did not like to say, it was not my fault if he did not get the meeting he wanted; and then he replied that if my mistress did inquire, I was to tell her he wanted to hear more explicitly from her own lips what he had not time fully to understand in the morning."

Chazeul laughed; "The poor youth writhes

like an eel upon a spear," he said; "he would fain make one more effort; but we will not let him. Now mark me, Blanchette, not one word of this to your mistress. She has been too much agitated to-day; and we must not have the same scenes every morning. She made herself clearly enough understood for any man of common sense; and by that Monsieur de Montigni must abide. I will not forget you, Blanchette, if you are faithful and discreet; and it is no bad post, première demoiselle to the Marchioness of Chazeul. So now, go to bed and sleep, and contrive to forget Monsieur de Montigni's commission before to-morrow morning."

"That I will, Monsieur," replied Blanchette; and with a curtsy she quitted the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE moments which the maid Blanchette passed with De Montigni, and afterwards with Chazeul, were full of anxiety to Rose d'Albret. She lay in darkness, wakeful and expectant, listening for every sound to give her some indication of the girl's return to the ante-chamber, from which she had heard her distinctly go forth, without knowing the cause. Imagination was busy with every painful possibility. She feared that their whole scheme of flight might be discovered; she thought that the maid might have conceived a suspicion from some little preparations which she had made during the evening; she asked herself what would be her fate if the execution of their design were prevented. Would they, could they, compel her to unite herself to Chazeul? and she now shrunk from the very idea with tenfold horror. She would

not do it, she thought; she would sooner die. She would seek the protection of the cloister—anything, she would do anything, rather than give her hand to one whom she equally disliked and despised. Suddenly, in the midst of these feelings, a sensation of wonder at their vehemence came over her; and she asked herself how it was that her ideas upon the subject had been so suddenly and completely changed.

She had till lately looked upon her marriage with Chazeul as a thing arranged, and to which she would submit, not without some repugnance, perhaps, but without that degree of horror and dislike which she now experienced. At first she had been coldly indifferent; and afterwards she had wished to put off the day of the sacrifice as long as possible; but she now felt that a life of penury and daily labour, would be comparative happiness to wedding Nicholas de Chazeul.

How had a single day made this strange difference? she inquired, and then she thought of De Montigni; and, though no eye could see her, the colour rose in her cheek, to feel how dif-

ferent were all her sensations towards him, how willingly to him she would yield heart and hand ! But the secret of the change was discovered,—she loved, and loved truly, and a new light had shone into her heart.

Quickly, however, her thoughts wandered back again to the present ; and once more she listened for Blanchette's return. Where could she have gone ? she asked herself ; what could be her motive, if something were not discovered ? Her own heart was too pure to attribute to the girl that conduct which, perhaps, if she had known all, would have been first suspected ; but as she raised herself on her arm, to give ear to some distant noise, she heard the outer door of the anteroom open again, and the step of the maid moving about in the neighbouring chamber. With a beating heart, and in breathless silence, Rose marked every sound, till at length a thin line of light, which crossed the floor from the key-hole, was suddenly extinguished ; and she heard the girl take her place in bed. A few minutes after, the clock of the château struck twelve, but Rose still lay quiet for some minutes

in order that the spy upon her actions might be asleep before she moved.

Blanchette, however, was one of the "dull weeds" that easily fasten themselves on "Lethe's shore." Herself was all she thought of, all she cared for; and, having provided to the best of her ability for the success and prosperity of that well-loved person, she was soon in the arms of slumber, undisturbed by any of the reproaches of conscience, or the lighter tones of imagination. The heavy breathing of profound and dreamless sleep was heard ere long; and, rising from her bed, Rose d'Albret dressed herself as well as she could in the darkness, and drew down the tapestry over the door between her room and that of the maid, to prevent Blanchette from hearing any sound within.

She feared that she should not be ready in time; and she hastened all her preparations eagerly, as much to withdraw her own thoughts from fears and apprehensions, as to guard against being too late; but, as so often happens, all was complete long before the hour;

and for nearly twenty minutes, she sat at a little distance from the window, trembling with agitation and alarm.

She had now full time to give way to all the busy thoughts that naturally sprang from her situation. She felt she loved—she trusted she was beloved in return; but still to fly with De Montigni from all other protection—to put herself entirely in his power—to cast herself thus into his arms; it was rash, she thought; it was foolish. Would he continue to love her? Might not his quickly-roused passion die away as soon? Might he not be the first to think her rash confidence in him, bold, almost immodest?

“No, no!” she answered, “he would not do so; he was too kind—too generous. He always had been. Why should she think him changed in mind and heart, in thought and feeling, since the bright days of his boyhood, when she had loved him so well? Did he not tell her that he had always loved her?—did he not promise to love her always?—and when had he ever broken his word? No, no! It was but agitation and weak terror made her doubt.”

Even if there were a risk, she thought again, even if the dream of happiness with Louis de Montigni, which had come with so sweet a relief to her heart, were not to be fully realised, yet, when the only alternative was to wed a man she now hated and contemned, could she hesitate to give herself to one she loved? and again she answered, "No! If death were the only other course, she would seek it, rather than give her hand to Nicholas de Chazeul."

Her mind then turned to the dangers of the way; to the chance of being stopped ere they could quit the castle; to the likelihood of being discovered and frustrated; to the shame and confusion that must follow. She pictured herself brought before Monsieur de Liancourt; she called up the scornful looks of Chazeul and the sneering taunts of his mother; and for a moment her heart sank as fancy painted the scene with the vividness of reality. But then her spirit rose; "I would not bear it," she said to herself. "I would own my love to one, and my hatred to the other. I would call for a sight of the contract that my father signed. I

would refuse to wed this man—ay, even if they dragged me to the altar. I would demand the protection of the good old Commander, and put myself under the guardianship of the law.”

Poor girl, she little knew how powerless was the law in France at that moment. “It is strange,” she continued, turning to another line of thought, “I have not heard the clock strike one; and yet it is long since twelve. Can anything have gone wrong? It must have struck without my hearing it.—How dark it is without! Not a star in the sky, and the moon down! Those must be drops of rain I hear.”

A moment after the heavy bell of the clock sounded upon her ear; and she found how long tedious expectation can make one short hour. Rose smiled at her own impatience, and said in her heart, “I must not let Louis know how eagerly I have watched for him; and yet, why not? If he be generous, as I think, to be so loved will but increase his own; and if he be not, no arts will keep a wayward heart. Hark, there is a sound!” and the next instant, something like the steel point of a sword’s scabbard, struck lightly against the window

Rose opened it without noise, and asked in a low and trembling voice, "Who is there?"

"'Tis I! 'tis I, my beloved," answered De Montigni, who was standing on a ladder, which had been placed against the window. "All is ready if you are. But, before you come, secure your maid in her own room. We have turned the key without. She is not to be trusted; and it were well to prevent her from giving the alarm to-morrow, till the last moment."

"There is but a bolt," said Rose d'Albret, "and I fear I shall wake her with the noise, for it is a very heavy one."

"Stay, dearest," replied her lover; "I will do it," and he sprang lightly into the room.

"Oh, Louis," whispered Rose, as he held her for a moment to his heart, "do not waste time."

"I will not," he answered. "Where is this bolt," and following Rose, who led him on with a trembling hand, he drew back the tapestry and felt for the bolt upon the door. Slowly and gently he pushed it forward; but this was not accomplished without some noise, and the heart of Rose d'Albret beat as if it would have burst

through her side. She could not even listen for the throbbing; but De Montigni bent down his ear; and after a moment he whispered, "It is all safe, she sleeps, my beloved. Now, Rose, now," and taking her hand in his, he led her back towards the window.

He felt by the trembling of her hand, that she was greatly agitated; and although, when he had first entered the room, he had given way, as we have seen, for a single instant, to the warm emotions of his heart, he would not now add by one rash caress to that which Rose already underwent. When they reached the window, however, he drew the other side of the casement farther back, to get out first and assist her in descending. But the lady detained him a moment by the hand, asking in a low voice, "And will you love me ever, Louis?"

"As from my earliest youth, so to my last hour, dear Rose," replied De Montigni in the same low tone.

"And will you never judge me rash, imprudent, bold, De Montigni?" again inquired the lady; "will you never reproach me, even in

your own secret heart, for listening to your persuasions? will you never think it was immodest or unfeminine to quit the shelter of my guardian's house, and give myself to you with this implicit confidence?"

"Never, dear Rose!" replied De Montigni; "banish such idle apprehensions. I shall ever feel the deepest gratitude. I shall ever feel respect for that decision which saves me the pain, the peril, and the grief of bringing to account my nearest relations for a most shameful attempt to violate the contract with your father, and to defraud me of my own—for you are my own, Rose. You are plighted to me from your infancy, and indeed, dear one, I have a right to demand, as the only one entitled to your hand, that you should take the only means by which it can be secured to me; and for your thus yielding willingly and readily, my thanks, and love, and gratitude, are yours for ever."

"Well, then, there is my hand, De Montigni," said Mademoiselle d'Albret, "and I am yours. I do not doubt you, Louis,—I do not doubt you; but in these things woman may well

be timid; for her all is at stake; and God knows those we play against are often cheats."

"Such am not I, dear Rose," replied her lover. "Come, my Rose, come!" and stepping out of the window, he held his hands towards her, to guide her in the descent.

Rose d'Albret closed her eyes, murmured a short prayer to God for protection and assistance in the course before her; and, after pausing one moment more, in lingering hesitation, she put her foot upon the ladder, and descended gently, with De Montigni steadying her steps. The height was not great, and the next minute her feet were upon the ground between the old château and the walls that defended it. There was no one below, for De Montigni had determined to come alone, in order to avoid all bustle and confusion.

"Now, dear girl, now," he said, "the first step to freedom is taken. Estoc is waiting for us on the walls; my horses are prepared with-out; and in five minutes we shall be in liberty."

"But how shall we pass the gates?" asked Rose; "they are always strictly guarded."

"We have placed men that can be depended upon," replied De Montigni, "and the sally port at the south, is in the hands of Estoc. This way, dearest, this way, to the bridge."

Their escape, however, was not destined to be effected so easily as they supposed; for when they reached the spot where the flying bridge which we have so often mentioned hung between the château and the outer walls, De Montigni, on looking up, perceived through the dim air of night that it was raised. There was a flight of stone steps, built against the body of the château, from the sort of paved court in which they were, to the door, that communicated with the bridge; and up these De Montigni sprang in a moment, leaving Rose d'Albret below. He found, however, that the chain which suspended the bridge in the air, was padlocked; and, descending again with a noiseless step, he asked his fair companion in a whisper "Who sleeps in the room on the right?"

"I do not know," replied Rose, "some of Monsieur de Chazeul's servants, I believe."

"There are people talking within," replied

De Montigni; "the bridge is up, the chains padlocked; and, even if they were not, the noise of letting it down would call attention. We must go round, dear Rose, to the staircase in the wall."

Rose D'Albret trembled very much; for her agitation was already so great, that any impediment made her heart sink with apprehension; but leaning on De Montigni's arm, she hurried along with him, and soon reached the staircase of which he had spoken, which in another minute led them to the top of the wall.

"Sit here for a moment, dearest," said De Montigni, "while I find Estoc, and do not raise your head above the parapet. He and I may pass for the guards; but the veil and ruff do not well imitate the steel cap and cuirass."

Rose silently did as he bade her, and gazed out, while he was gone, through the neighbouring embrasure. The country through which she was to pass lay before her; but it was all dark and indistinct, like the wide land of the future in the journey of life. There was no star to betoken hope in the sky above; thick

clouds, like frowning fate, covered the whole heaven; and though the few heavy drops of rain which had fallen had ceased for the time, there were low sobbing gusts of wind, which seemed to say, that they would soon commence again.

Sad and apprehensive, Rose d'Albret gazed over the scene, and with curious eye strove to trace out the road along which she was to travel, as one does so often and so vainly in the mortal night which surrounds us here below. Fortunately, however, she had not much time for gloomy meditations. In less than two minutes De Montigni was by her side again, accompanied by Estoc, who bent down and kissed her hand, saying "Come, Mademoiselle, come, don't be frightened about the bridge being up, that is done against those on the outside of the wall, not those on the in. We will soon reach the sally port; but we must cross the court first."

"But who are those that Monsieur de Montigni heard talking in the room to the right of the bridge door?" asked Rose D'Albret in a whisper.

"On my body and life I do not know," replied Estoc; "some of Chazeul's people, about no good, I'll warrant; but they'd better not come near us, or I'll split their skulls and his too, if he meddles. This way, Mademoiselle."

"Hush!" cried Rose drawing back, "there is a man coming along the wall.—Oh Heaven! who can it be?"

"Nobody but Paul the sentinel," replied Estoc. "I placed him here on guard, lady, and he knows his business.—Come!" and leading her on, he passed close by the warder, who for his part, when they approached, turned his back to them, and gazed out over the country.

To witness such a thorough understanding between her companions and the guards, restored some degree of confidence and hope to Rose d'Albret; and, hurrying forward, they descended the stairs by which she had mounted, chose the second archway in the body of the building, and crossed the vacant court, where all was still and silent, except a large eagle which was chained to a perch in the midst, and which, disturbed in its reveries by their passing near,

flapped its large wings, and uttered a shrill cry. Taking through another archway on the opposite side of the court, they threaded one or two of the passages of the building, and soon reached a paved passage, or *coulisse*, similar to that which ran between the château and the wall on the northern side. As they walked along, Rose remarked that De Montigni drew round to the side of Estoc, and whispered something in his ear.

"I do not know," replied the old soldier; "I placed him there not ten minutes ago. Perhaps he is standing under the arch."

"I do not think it," said De Montigni; "there is no depth to hide him; and I can see no one."

"My eyes are not so good as they were," answered Estoc; "but he may have opened the door for aught we know, to have all ready."

"What is the matter?" asked Mademoiselle d'Albret, clinging to De Montigni's arm; "what has gone amiss?"

"Nothing, dearest, nothing," replied De Montigni. "'Tis only that we do not see the

guard who was placed with the keys of the sally port. He may, perhaps, have opened the door and gone in; or he may have walked on to the end."

When they reached the low-browed door in the wall, however, which was to give them exit from the château of Marzay, they found no one there, and the heavy iron-covered gate tightly locked. Swearing an oath or two in an under tone, Estoc looked up and down the passage to see if he could perceive the careless warder; but nothing was to be discovered; and no sound or footfall gave notice that he was near.

"Stay," said the old soldier; "stay a moment here, I will go and see for him. I cannot understand this at all. Yet there can be no danger, lady, so do not be afraid; for if anything were discovered, we should find people enough here."

"But if any one should come, while you are gone?" asked Rose d'Albret, in a faltering tone.

"Why, then, you must hide yourselves amongst those passages opposite," replied the old soldier. "You know them well, both of you,

for many a hunt have I had after you amongst them, when you were children."

Notwithstanding all her apprehensions, Rose d'Albret could but smile, as the old man's words brought up before her mind the picture of the happy hours of childhood; and she laid her hand fondly on De Montigni's arm, feeling that she did love him truly, and had loved him longer than she once thought she had.

"Let us go at once, Louis," she said, "into what we used to call the labyrinth; they would not find us easily there, and we can watch till he comes back."

"Ay, ay," said Estoc; "go there, pretty lady. I will not be a minute, for the man cannot be far off."

Thus saying he left them; and crossing the passage, they entered an arch, a little way farther down, which communicated with some of the inferior parts of the building but little used by the household, and was traversed by narrow stone corridors, with innumerable staircases to rooms above. Placing themselves under the shelter of the vault they waited, listening to the

